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THE LIFE OF CHRIST

Jesus Christ - Life

THE

LIFE OF CHRIST

BY

S. BONAVENTURE

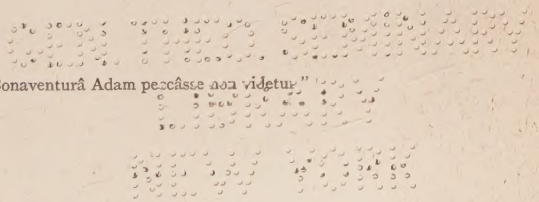
Bonaventura, St. Card. (originally Giovanni di Fidanza, called "the Seraphic Doctor")

TRANSLATED AND EDITED

BY THE

REV. W. H. HUTCHINGS, M.A.

SUB-WARDEN OF THE HOUSE OF MERCY, CLEWER



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INTRODUCTION.

THE author of "The Imitation" has warned us, that in reading devout books, we should not pay overmuch attention to the question "who said this?" but "attend to what is said." And this caution is important, as a guard against the vulgar practice of investing sayings and writings with a factitious value, simply because they proceed from some one who has rank or position. Yet "the authority of the writer" must not be altogether left out of our calculation, when, as in the present instance, it is founded upon the combined possession of sanctity and wisdom. These are intrinsic qualities; and to attempt to divide the consideration of the book in such a case from the life of the author, would be like the endeavour to separate the rays of light from the orb from which they emanate. We will commence, then, with a brief account of S. Bonaventure himself, and then make some introductory comments on his "Life of Christ."

In the little and picturesque town of Bagdarea, in Tuscany, John of Fidenza was born, in A.D. 1221, of pious and noble parents. The name of John was given him in Holy Baptism, but he is always known by that of Bonaven-

tune, which sometimes had the former name added to it. The following story accounts for his new title. At the age of four years he was dangerously ill, and when the disease from which he was suffering had gone beyond the reach of physicians, his mother—for her son was "her sole consolation and dear hope"—betook herself to S. Francis of Assisi, and in an agony of grief threw herself at his feet, beseeching him to pray for the restoration of her child. S. Francis, touched with pity, granted her request, and John of Fidenza recovered. S. Francis conceived a tender love for the child, and when the Saint was himself nearing the confines of another world, he, with a sort of prophetic rapture, predicting the great services which John would render to the Church, cried out, "*O buona ventura!*" And henceforth John became Bonaventure. His mother, in gratitude for his recovery, dedicated her son to God. Thus S. Bonaventure was like S. Augustine, the result of a mother's tears. Mary of Ritelli resembles Monica in her devotion to her child; but Bonaventure was in one respect unlike Augustine, although he himself would not allow you to believe this. From his earliest years he was filled with the love of God; his spiritual life was not built on a previous ruin, but on a holy childhood and youth.

He took the first opportunity of fulfilling the vow which his mother had made, and at the age of twenty-two entered the Order of S. Francis, of which he was one day to become one of the brightest ornaments. He was now brought under the influence of two Englishmen; first of Haymo, the

General of the Order, and afterwards, in Paris, of "The Irrefragable Doctor," Alexander of Hales. It was at this period of his life that he first came into contact with Aquinas, and an intimate friendship sprang up between them. Both had the gift of genius in the supernatural as well as the natural sphere. Their friendship has been compared to that which existed between S. Basil and S. Gregory Nazianzen.

S. Bonaventure made rapid progress in theology, scholastic philosophy, and, what is more, in his own spiritual life, during the time he spent in the University of Paris, whither he had been sent by his superiors, to complete his studies.

Perhaps in every spiritual life there is a dominant feature; at any rate, there was in the life of Bonaventure: it was his intense humility. It is the virtue which, beyond all others, he sets before us for imitation in the "Life of Christ." Though devotion, poverty, and charity are conspicuous gems in his spiritual treasury, the most brilliant of all is humility. It is said that he often felt his unworthiness to such an extent, that he dared not approach the Holy Table. When his reputation for learning was at its highest, and astonished even those who knew him best, S. Thomas himself sharing that amazement, and wondering from what sources his friend gained his wisdom and knowledge, one day questioned Bonaventure upon this point, whereupon the Saint pointed to Christ upon the Cross, and replied, "I study Christ, and Him crucified."

Bonaventure became professor of philosophy at thirty-

three, which was two years short of the required age for filling a public chair in the University. And two years after, in 1256, a further dignity awaited him, in conjunction with his friend, Aquinas; Alexander IV. called them both to receive the Doctor's cap. Here the humility of the two Saints proved an inconvenience, for either wanted the other to take precedence; and it was not until after a severe struggle that S. Thomas at last gave way, and was first made Doctor.

Bonaventure was also elected General of his Order. He must have had some acquaintance with English ideas from one who had occupied the very chair to which he was destined to succeed; but a further connection with this country was now offered him. In 1265, he was asked by Clement IV. to accept the Archbishopric of York, but he declined the honour. In chapter thirty-five of the following work we may, perhaps, discover the thoughts which guided him in refusing this post of dignity. He was not one of those who are "ever ready for honours, for the highest posts, ecclesiastical dignities—formidable even for the shoulders of angels to bear." However, his *nolo episcopari* was soon to be overruled, for Gregory X. made him a Cardinal, and Bishop of Albano. He had, of course, to be found, before he could be brought acquainted with the twofold distinction which awaited him. Two Papal nuncios were accordingly despatched, and Bonaventure was summoned to Rome. It is said, that the messengers who bore with them the insignia of the Cardinalate discovered Bonaventure in his grey tunic and knotted girdle, engaged in the menial but necessary

duty of washing the plates in a court of the monastery, after his brethren had refreshed themselves at a meal; and that he asked the new arrivals to hang up the hat for a few minutes, until he had finished the task before him.

S. Bonaventure was a man of extraordinary influence, and lived at one of the great epochs of history, the crises of society. Western Christianity had reached its zenith of greatness and of power. S. Bonaventure arose amid a galaxy of saints and philosophers; it was the age of S. Dominic, S. Francis, S. Louis, S. Thomas, of Roger Bacon, Alexander of Hales, Albert the Great, and Dun Scotus. Some of these luminaries were rising, some setting; but amidst them all Bonaventure shines with a special lustre, his rays marked by a red glow, a mystic fervour, the reflection of a S. Bernard and of the two S. Victors, which gave him the name of "The Seraphic Doctor."

He became General of his Order at a time when "it needed," according to Dean Milman, "all his commanding gentleness, unrivalled learning, and depth of piety" to deal with the disputes amongst and concerning the Franciscans, and to ward off the fatal schism then impending. S. Bonaventure added statesmanship to piety, and thus healed for a time the wounds which passion and fanaticism had inflicted on his Order. S. Louis, who had a special regard for Bonaventure, and often entertained him, took, of course, the side of the Mendicants, and followed S. Bonaventure's advice in this, as in other matters.

But the great enterprise in which his pacific powers

were finally exercised, was that for the reunion of Western with Eastern Christendom. The purpose of the second Council of Lyons was to establish peace throughout Christendom, and Michael Palæologus was most desirous that the schism should be healed. S. Bonaventure was the most conspicuous figure in the assembly, though five hundred bishops and seventy abbots, besides a multitude of dignitaries, were present. S. Bonaventure preached during the sittings of the Council, which commenced on May 7, A.D. 1274, and died before its close, S. Thomas having died on his way to it. The act for the reunion of West and East, though so soon to be set aside, was passed mostly through the influence of the Seraphic Doctor. The Latin clergy chanted the Nicene Creed in Latin, the Greek in Greek, the "filioque" clause being thrice repeated, before the conclusion of the Council: but Bonaventure had passed to his heavenly reward. He was taken with sickness, which continued to his death, and deprived him of the consolation of the Blessed Sacrament and its support for the last journey. He died on July 14, 1274, the day on which he is commemorated in the Roman Calendar, being fifty-three years of age. Cardinal Peter of Tarentaise preached his funeral sermon, taking for his text, "I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan." On the morrow, at the fifth session of the Council, the Pope, with deep emotion, announced the death of Bonaventure, adding, "*Cecidit columna Christianitatis.*" Bonaventure was canonized not only at the request of ecclesiastics, but of the reigning monarchs of Europe.

And Sixtus V. placed his name amongst the Doctors of the Church.

To give an idea of the extent of S. Bonaventure's writings, it may be mentioned, that the Vatican Edition fills seven folio volumes. In the edition from which the following translation is made (1668) his works are divided into four large tomes, each containing about a thousand foolscap pages with double columns. Two of these volumes are occupied with profound dissertations on Peter Lombard's "Book of Sentences;" one with an exposition of different parts of Holy Scripture; and the fourth is a collection of mystical treatises, etc., of which the following work forms one.

It is important, before reading S. Bonaventure's "Life of Christ," to know what to expect and what not to expect. It is not an expository commentary on the Holy Gospels, nor does it aim at setting before us in one continuous history the various acts of our Divine Lord. Of the beginning and close of Christ's Life, S. Bonaventure's method is to leave no event unrecorded; but during His Public Ministry, he is content to make a selection from our Lord's words and actions. There is a long digression of about a dozen chapters on the relative scope and value of the Active and the Contemptative Life, which, we believe, has never before formed a part of any English translation of this work, if we except "The Mirrour of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ,"[1] the oldest English translation. On ac-

[1] A copy, somewhat imperfect, is to be found in the British Museum: the date ascribed to it is 1495; printer *Richard Poynson.*

count of the spiritual beauty of these chapters, we have translated the whole of them.

S. Bonaventure, in his "Life of Christ," endeavours throughout to fix the gaze of the soul on the Divine Object. He is continually pointing to the Face of our Lord, and ever bidding us "contemplate *Him*." He avoids the mistake of enlarging upon the surroundings to the detriment of the central Figure. Beauty of scenery, historic association, local custom, are all of value, if they lead the attention up to, and do not tend to draw it away from, the Life Itself. S. Bonaventure is content to set before us the Acts and Sufferings of Christ. Each chapter is a "picturing" of Him; each, a sort of idyll rather than a commentary. He constantly reminds us that we must be present in spirit, and watch the scene "as if it took place before our own eyes."

But, as in painting an event of which we have only a written record, there will be much which must be necessarily filled in by the imagination; so in these meditations on the "Life of Christ," we have not only set before us what actually took place, but also *what the Saint thought was likely to have happened*. Facts are necessary for faith, and the *lex credendi* must be the foundation of the *lex orandi*, but devotion may in some measure be excited by pious opinion. S. Bonaventure adds lights and shadows of his own, and enriches the subject here and there from the store of a devout imagination. Some will delight in these additions, perhaps attributing them to the illumination of the Holy Spirit acting directly on the mind of a Saint; whilst others

may reject them as fanciful and puerile. As an instance of this mode of supplying incidents which *may* have occurred, but are not recorded, we may point to the eighty-fourth chapter, which contains a meditation for Holy Saturday. In it, Peter is described as coming to and knocking at the door of the house where the Blessed Virgin and John were abiding; and John is represented as opening the door at the request of the Blessed Mother, and admitting Peter. Peter enters, manifesting signs of deep sorrow and remorse, and says, "I am ashamed of myself; I ought not to make any appearance before others; because my Lord, who loved me so greatly, I have abandoned and denied." There are many instances in the "Life of Christ" in which S. Bonaventure in a similar manner relates events, or some details of events, as he supposed that they might have happened. He warns his readers not to regard such matters as "low and childish;" and at the same time occasionally reminds them that they are not what may be called "Gospel Truths," but simply the creations of his devout imagination.

Sometimes S. Bonaventure suggests two ways in which an action might have taken place, and leaves his readers to make a choice between them. Such an alternative may be found in the accounts of the Paschal Supper, and of the Crucifixion. Of the former the Saint says, "Observe that you may view this in either of two ways: one, that the disciples sit at table as I have said; the other, that they stand erect with staves in their hands." Of the latter, we read, "Some there are who think that this was not the method of Cruci-

fixion, *i.e.* by making our Lord ascend a ladder before the nailing of His Body to the Cross; but that they fastened Him to the Cross when it was laid on the ground before it was raised." S. Bonaventure is not dogmatic, except when he thinks he is backed by the letter of Scripture, and by the authority of "ancient authors." His purpose is not to be critical or simply instructive, but to excite the affections and to influence the will; and in furtherance of this end, he will sometimes introduce a legend or a story, which doubtless was likely to have greater effect upon himself and those whom he had in view, than it may have upon us now.

It must be borne in mind that Bonaventure is an Italian, a Franciscan, and that he lived in the thirteenth century; and will hardly, therefore, be expected to view things from the same standpoint as an Englishman, a man of the world, and one whose lot is cast in the nineteenth century. As a general rule it is found that interpretations of Scriptural precepts to some degree reflect the spirit of the age in which they are made, and the circumstances of the commentator. The "Life of Christ" is viewed through the medium of a Rule which insisted on poverty as its prime principle, world-renunciation, and simplicity. Thus we find Bonaventure enforcing poverty continually, and delighting to picture His Divine Master "barefoot," and taking His repasts "outside the towns and dwellings of men," "sitting on the ground," drinking "from some stream." The Saint does not with equal force dwell on the other side of the comprehensive character of Christ,—"the Son of Man came eating and

drinking." A member of a Mendicant Order would be likely to represent our Lord not only as poor and having nowhere to lay His Head; but further, as seeking alms and occasionally begging for a subsistence. At the door of some poor man Christ craves admission, we are told, during the three days when He was lost at Jerusalem. During the Hidden Life of Nazareth, again, Christ is depicted doing the humble offices, setting out "the frugal board," arranging the dormitory, etc. When money is offered Him, the Holy Child is not a little abashed, yet holds out His hand to receive it, "*out of love for poverty.*" Everything which seems to fall in with the circumstances of the life of the Franciscan has, of course, a special charm for Bonaventure. The bride of S. Francis was poverty, and he loved it in its lowest form—mendicancy.

Especially in S. Bonaventure's estimate of embroidery and ornamental work, we see the austere simplicity of the follower of the Saint of Assisi, and therefore receive his denunciation of all "superfluous and curious workmanship" with respectful limitation. Bonaventure gives six different reasons for fleeing from the making and using of such trifles "as from a venomous serpent." He is careful, however, to exclude from his searching condemnation "works of art, devoted to the decoration of Churches." But he only says he does not condemn *all* such; for the Franciscan Ritual was of the simplest character, and the vestments of the poorest material. The gorgeous services which were soon to be witnessed in the Church of Assisi bore witness to a

departure from the spirit of S. Francis. The question may occur,—Would it not have been wise to omit the Seraphic Doctor's views as to the iniquities of embroidery? The reply is, that much wholesome warning is contained in his six reasons, which may still be of good service as cautions against certain faults which may readily attach themselves to an innocent employment. And it is evident that it was the evil, not so much in the occupation, as in the dispositions and aims which are apt to take possession of the minds of those whose fingers are thus employed, which S. Bonaventure had himself in view.

There are two other points to which we must allude before concluding these introductory comments. The Blessed Virgin, in S. Bonaventure's "Life of Christ," less indeed than in some other of his works, holds a prominent position. Here and there an expression has been slightly modified or left out with regard to the mother of our Lord. Even the title "Mother of God," though it has the authority of a General Council, has not been inserted, lest those unaccustomed to it should take offence or alarm. It cannot be denied that the warmth of S. Bonaventure's character and his passion for mysticism betrayed him into expressions of excessive devotion towards the Blessed Virgin in some of his Works, though the Psalter of the Blessed Virgin Mary is probably not to be included amongst them. But whatever his love for her might have been, it is quite evident that he never lost sight of the infinite difference between the most exalted creature and the In-

carnate God. One quotation from chapter ten, "*Of the Delay of the Blessed Virgin at the Manger*," will be sufficient proof of this assertion. "With what reverence, caution, and timorous care did" His mother "handle Him, Whom she knew to be her Lord and her God, falling on her knees when she took Him from the manger, or placed Him in it!" And it is manifest also, that no love for the creature was allowed to come into competition with the love of the Creator in the soul of Bonaventure. In his "Itinerary of the Soul to God," he rises with illumined intellect and inflamed affections to the primal Source of Light and Love; he finds no rest in creatures. "Christ is the Way, Christ the Door, Christ the Ladder, the Mercy-seat," etc.; "Let us pass with Christ crucified to the Father;" "Little or nothing is to be attributed to the creature: all to the Creative Essence—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost."[1] "The soul, to be at rest, must pass into union with God." These qualifications are essential, if we would rightly estimate the position which Mary held in the mind and heart of the Saint. In his "Life of Christ" he is careful throughout, whatever may be his love for the Mother, to fix our eyes and our hearts on the Son as the Central Figure.

We have thought, on the whole, that it was advisable to retain the eighty-sixth chapter, which relates the appearance of our Lord on Easter Day first to His Mother. To leave it out would have been to act inconsistently, as in other parts of the Work we have retained probable occurrences. Moreover,

[1] Itin. Men. cap. vii.

as has been before pointed out, Bishop Jeremy Taylor, in his "Life of Christ," alludes to this event, when he says, when "our Lord had comforted the souls of the Fathers with the presence of His Spirit, so now He saw it to be time to bring comfort to His holy mother."[1] It may be objected that such an appearance to our Lord's mother may not be classed among "probable occurrences," as S. Mark[2] declared that Christ *first* appeared to S. Mary Magdalene. The decision which is arrived at on this question must depend upon the exact meaning which is attached to the word "first." If it is taken absolutely, then the appearance of Christ to the Blessed Virgin before all others, cannot be regarded as a probable or possible event; if, however, "first" is only regarded as a relative term, in reference to the Apostles, then it will be allowable to imagine that natural love was permitted to have its free exercise on the morning of the Resurrection; and that therefore, though unrecorded, as S. Bonaventure himself reminds us the event is, our Lord's first visitation was made to her who bore Him. S. Bonaventure does not hold, as some, that our Lord remained in the company of His mother during the Great Forty Days; but concludes that He abode within the folds of the inner world, from which He emerged from time to time for the purpose of appearing to His disciples.

The other point to be noticed is the way in which S. Bonaventure does not shrink from picturing our Lord in the performance of menial actions, and from giving the details of His Human Life and Sufferings. Some decline

[1] Life of Christ, pt. iii. sect. 16. [2] S. Mark xvi. 9.

to depict what may be called the lower side of our Lord's Life—and it is truly so described, for He is "equal to the Father, as touching His Godhead; and inferior to the Father, as touching His Manhood"—out of a mistaken regard for His Divinity. And for this reason it has been supposed, that the Evangelist of the Godhead, S. John, excludes from His Gospel those scenes of deepest humiliation, the Agony in the Garden, and the forsaking on the Cross; whereas the explanation of these omissions may, perhaps, rather be found in the complemental character of his Gospel. To fear to dwell upon all that relates to our Lord's Human Nature, arises from a feeble grasp of the Mystery of the Incarnation; as though in some way He must be less Divine if *really* human. When once the cardinal truth that Christ was not a human person but a Divine Person is fully admitted, then every action of His Manhood may be safely contemplated. If any one wishes to see what S. Bonaventure says on this point, he will find it in his treatment of the question "whether it can be allowed that Christ was a human person," in Tom. iii. 110–115. There it is laid down that our Lord may not be regarded as *a* man united to the Divine Word, but as a Divine Person only, who assumed our manhood. His Divine Personality makes Christ "to be called and to be truly God." It is not, then, reverence, but want of right faith, which would find ground of offence in the "Life of Christ," because that Life is depicted after too human a manner.

We will conclude with two observations which are to be found in the "Devout Life." S. Francis de Sales says, with

regard to meditation on the Life of Christ, "I commend earnest mental Prayer to you, most particularly such as bears upon the Life and Passion of our Lord. It is not without meaning that the Saviour calls Himself the Bread come down from heaven;—just as we eat bread with all manner of food, so we need to meditate and feed upon our Dear Lord in every prayer and action. His Life has been meditated upon and written about by various authors." Again, "You should have some good devout book at hand, such as the writings of S. Bonaventure." Such is the opinion of S. Francis de Sales as to the necessity of ever setting before our eyes the Life of Christ, and his sense of the value of the writings of the author of this book.

To quote another authority: Gerson says, "In my opinion one of the best authors that a man can read is Eustachius, for so we may translate his name of Bonaventure . . . . most proper and safe for the enlightening of the judgment and inflaming the heart."[1]

In almost all instances in this translation we have inserted the text of the Bible or Prayer-Book, and where it has been found necessary, for the sake of the meaning, to preserve the original Vulgate, we have intimated the same, by adding "V" to the marginal references.

W. H. H.

The Warden's Lodge, Clewer,
Epiphany, 1881.

[1] Du Pin, "Eccl. Writers," vol. ii. p. 432.

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PREFACE.

Among the many commendations passed on the virtues and excellence of the holy virgin Cecilia, it is reported of her that she was in the habit of carrying, hidden in her bosom, the Gospel of Christ. By this we are to understand that she selected from the Life of the Lord Jesus, as recorded in the Gospel, some passages which more especially stirred her devotion, upon which she meditated day and night with pure and undivided heart, with attention and earnestness; going over them again and again without leaving out any, and ruminating upon them with sweetness and delight, she laid them up in her inmost heart. I advise you to do the same. Above all other things, too, for I believe that in the pursuit of the spiritual life this practice is most necessary, and most beneficial, and that which is calculated to lead to a higher state. For nowhere will you find such teaching to arm you against vain and fleeting flatteries—against tribulations and adversities, against the temptations of enemies and vices—as in the Life of the Lord Jesus, the Life which had no defect and had every perfection. Indeed, from the

frequent and habitual meditation on His Life, the soul is drawn into a certain familiarity, confidence, and love of Him, so that other things are counted worthless and are despised. Moreover, we are thereby strengthened and taught, what to do, and what to avoid.

And first, I say, that the constant meditation on the Life of the Lord Jesus strengthens and renders steady the mind against vain and fleeting things, as appears in the case of the blessed Cecilia to whom I have alluded, whose heart was so filled with the Life of Christ, that into it no vanity could enter. Even amidst the pomp of her nuptials, when there was so much display, singing, and music, she remained with her heart fixed upon God alone, saying to Him, "O Lord, cause my heart and my body to be undefiled, that I be not confounded."

Secondly, the Life of Jesus fortifies us in the midst of tribulations and adversities, as is manifest in the sufferings of the martyrs. Concerning this S. Bernard thus speaks: "Whence does the martyr gain the resolution to suffer, but from the Wounds of Christ, which he contemplates with all devotion, and in which, by constant meditation, he dwells? Therein the martyr stands jubilant and triumphant, though his whole body is being torn to pieces and mangled on the rack. Where then is the soul of the martyr? Where—but in the Wounds of Jesus, those Wounds open to receive him. Had it been in the depths of his own being, he would, dwelling upon his sufferings, have become so conscious of

them, that he would have succumbed and denied the faith." From the same source, not only martyrs, but also confessors, in their tribulations and infirmities, had, and always have, so great patience. If you read of S. Francis and the virgin S. Clare, you will find how, in manifold tribulations, deprivations, and infirmities, they not only remained patient, but even joyful. The same is manifested to-day by those who lead a holy life; and it arises from the fact that their souls neither were nor are simply in their own bodies, but by devout meditation upon His Life were in Christ.

Thirdly, I say, that the Life of Jesus teaches us what we ought to do, insomuch that neither enemies nor vices can assault or deceive us, when we have in Him the perfection of virtues. For where else will you find such virtues—such exalted poverty, exceeding lowliness, profound wisdom, examples of prayer, meekness, obedience, patience, and all other virtues, and doctrine, as in the Life of the Lord of Hosts? Accordingly S. Bernard thus sums up this matter: "He labours in vain in the pursuit of virtues, who expects to find them anywhere but in the Lord of Hosts, Whose doctrine is the school of prudence, Whose mercy is the work of justice, Whose Life is the mirror of temperance, Whose Death is the mark of fortitude." He, therefore, who follows Him can neither err nor be deceived; to the imitation and pursuit of Whose virtues, the heart is kindled and animated by frequent meditation. At length he is enlightened by virtue and so clothed with it, that he discerns truth from

falsehood; thus it is that many illiterate persons have become versed in the great and profound mysteries of God. How think you, did S. Francis attain to such abundance of virtues, to such deep insight into the meaning of Scripture, to such clear discernment of the illusions of spiritual foes and vices, but from familiar conversation with and meditation upon the Lord Jesus? Hence it was, that he was so ardently attached to the Life of Christ, that his own life became a picture of it. For he imitated it in the practice of all virtues as perfectly as he could; and at length, Jesus, it is said, completed and perfected the likeness by the imprint of His Sacred Wounds, so that he became wholly transformed into Him. You see, then, to what an eminent state the soul attains by meditating on the Life of Christ; and yet this is but, as it were, a foundation upon which it can rise to more sublime degrees of contemplation. For the unction which is found therein, by degrees purifies and elevates the soul, and imparts to it all knowledge. With this, however, we are not now concerned.

But now I propose to introduce you to the meditations themselves on the Life of Christ; though I would that you had a more experienced and learned guide, for I am most unequal to undertake such a task. But as I judge it to be more to your advantage to say something, whatever it be, than to remain quite silent, I will make trial of my poor powers, and speak with you familiarly, in a plain and unpolished style, which you will the more easily understand, and which will

make you study not so much to gratify the ear as to improve the heart. For it is not to ornaments of speech, but to meditation on the Life of Christ, that I want you to give your attention. S. Jerome reminds us of this when he says, "Plain words reach even to the heart; but polished sentences feed the ears." Yet I hope that my slender powers may prove of some benefit to your imperfect state. But what I hope still more is, that, if you exercise yourself with careful meditation herein, the Lord Himself, on whom we are discoursing, will become your Master. You are not, however, to expect that we shall be able to meditate on everything which Christ said or did, or to think that we have a record of all. But in order to make a deeper impression on the mind, I shall relate those things as if they had actually happened, in such ways as it is possible they may have happened, according to certain imaginary representations which the mind is capable in different ways of forming. For it is allowable to meditate upon, explain, and understand Holy Scripture in many ways, as we conceive to be most expedient; provided that there is nothing contrary to the truth of Christ's Life, righteousness, and doctrine, and nothing contrary to faith and good morals. But when you find me saying, the Lord Jesus thus spoke or acted, or whatever else is introduced of that kind; if it is unable to be verified by Scripture, you must regard it merely as the effect of devout meditation. That is, take it as if I said, you can imagine that the Lord Jesus spoke or acted thus, and so of

the rest. But if from this work you desire to gain fruit, you must bring yourself to be present at those things which are related as said or done by Christ, as if you heard them with your own ears, and saw them with your own eyes, your whole mind being diligently, gratefully, and carefully applied to them—all other cares and anxieties having been for the time set aside. Wherefore I pray you, beloved friend, that this my task, which I have undertaken for the honour of the Lord Jesus, for your profit and my own advantage, you will accept gladly; and joyfully, devoutly, and diligently turn it to account. We must begin with the Incarnation; but before entering upon the consideration of that Mystery, we can meditate upon God and His blessed angels in Heaven, and also upon the Blessed Virgin on earth, subjects which seem first to demand our attention. We will, then, now begin to contemplate them.

CHAPTER I.

Respecting the Deep Concern the Angels had for us.

When for an immense period of time, more than four thousand years, the human race lay in misery, on account of the sin of the first man, not one soul being able to soar to his native Country; the blessed angelical spirits, we can imagine, compassionated so great a fall, and anxious for the restoration of their own ranks, when "the fulness of time" had now come, assembling themselves together, presented themselves before God, and falling down on their faces before Him, devoutly and earnestly pressed upon Him their supplications and said, "O Lord, it pleased Thy Majesty to make the rational creature, namely man, because of Thy goodness, that he might be here with us, and that the restoration of our numbers might be brought about by his presence. But behold! the whole race is perishing, and not one is saved; and throughout the ages which are past we see our enemies triumphing over all, when instead of our ranks being filled up, the caverns of hell are crowded. Wherefore then, O Lord, didst Thou make man? 'Why are the souls which confess to Thee, delivered to beasts?'[1] And if this be in accord with Thy justice, yet now is the time of mercy. And if their first parents unwarily transgressed Thy commandment, let Thy mercy come to their

[1] Ps. lxxiv. 20. V.

help. Remember that Thou didst create them in Thy own likeness. Extend, O Lord, mercifully Thy hand to them, and replenish them mercifully. The eyes of all look to Thee, 'as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters,'[1] until Thou wilt have mercy, and deliver the human race by a saving remedy."

CHAPTER II.

Of the Contention between Mercy and Justice, Truth and Peace.

When this address was ended, represent to yourself Mercy in union with Peace, beating at the heart of the Father, asking for help; but Truth, in union with Justice, taking the opposite side. And between them there was a great contention, as S. Bernard relates in his beautiful and diffuse style. But I will, as concisely as possible, give the sum of what he says. For I intend often to introduce his mellifluous words, but, for the most part, condensed for the sake of brevity. Thus, in this place what he says is as follows. Mercy said unto the Lord, "Wilt Thou, O Lord, cast man away for ever, or wilt Thou forget to show mercy?"[2] This was whispered in the ears of the Almighty continuously for a long time. The Lord replied, "Let your sisters be called whom you see ready to oppose you, and let us hear what they say." The two attributes being summoned, Mercy resumed: "The rational creature stands in need of Divine commiseration, for he has become miserable, yes, full of misery, and the time for mercy has already come and is

[1] Ps. cxxiii. 2. [2] Ps. lxxvii. 8, 9.

passing away." Truth interrupts: "The Lord must keep His word which He has spoken. Let Adam and all his race who were in him die, when through disobedience he tasted the forbidden fruit." Mercy replied, "Wherefore then, O Lord, hast Thou made me? For Truth itself must own there is reason for this question, if you forbear for ever to have mercy." "On the other hand," says Truth, "if the transgressor evades Thy sentence, Truth must perish, and cannot remain for ever." Hence this contention was referred to the Son, before whom Truth and Mercy repeated their respective claims; and Truth added, "I confess, O Lord, that Mercy may be moved by a good zeal, but not according to Justice, which would rather spare the transgressor than her sister attribute." But Mercy rejoins, "You spare neither, but are so fierce with anger against the transgressor, that you involve me, your sister, in his destruction." But Truth, unmoved, urges her cause most strongly: "O Lord, Thou art involved in this question, and it is for Thee to hinder the sentence of Thy Father from being made void." Peace now began to speak: "Cease this contention; it is not right for attributes to dispute each other's claims." The controversy, however, seemed momentous, and the reasons which were urged on both sides valid and powerful. There appeared to be no way of preserving both Mercy and Truth in reference to man. But the King wrote the sentence, which He gave to Peace, being nearest to His throne, to read and deliver. It ran thus: "One says, 'I perish if Adam does not die;' the other says, 'I perish if he does not find mercy.' Let death become a good thing, and let both have what they ask." All were amazed at the wisdom of this decree, and agreed that Adam should die, and so obtain mercy. But how, sought they, can death be made good, seeing that the bare sound of the word conveys horror? The King answered, "The death

of sinners is most dreadful, but the death of the saints is 'precious,'[1] and the gate of life. Let one be found who, though not subject to death, dies out of love. He, not being subject to it, cannot be holden by it, but will force his way through death, and make a passage through which those who are freed can follow him." All acquiesced in this. But "where can such a one be found?" was the question. Then Truth went back to earth, and Mercy remained in heaven. As the Prophet says, "Thy Mercy, O Lord, is in heaven, and Thy Truth reacheth even to the clouds."[2] And it encompasses the world. But no one was found pure from the stain of sin,[3] not even the infant of a day old. But Mercy searched throughout heaven, and found no one who had love enough to undertake this work. For all of us are servants, who, when we have done well, ought to say according to that which is written in S. Luke, "We are unprofitable servants."[4] And as none could be found who had such charity as to lay down his life for unprofitable servants, they, Mercy and Truth, returned at the appointed day. Not having found what they sought for, Peace said, "Know ye not, or have ye forgotten, that 'there is none that doeth good, no, not one'?[5] He alone who gave you this counsel can bring it to pass." When the King saw this He said, "It repenteth Me that I have made man.[6] I must repent on behalf of man whom I have made." And Gabriel being called He said, "Go, tell the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee."[7] Thus far are the words of S. Bernard. You see, then, how great is the danger which sin causes, and how difficult it is to find a remedy. The before-mentioned attributes were best brought into harmony, it would seem, in the Person of the Son. For the Person of the Father, in a certain way, appeared

[1] Ps. cxvi. 15. [2] Ps. xxxvi. 5. [3] Job xxv.
[4] S. Luke xvii. 10. [5] Ps. xiv. 3. [6] Gen. vi. 6. [7] Zech. ix. 9.

terrible and powerful, so that Peace and Mercy had cause for apprehension. Then the Person of the Spirit is most benign, and so Truth and Justice had cause for apprehension. Therefore the Person of the Son was accepted as in the mean between the Two, to work out this remedy. This, however, you must understand not in a literal but in a descriptive sense. Then was that prediction fulfilled—"Mercy and Truth have met together; Righteousness and Peace have kissed each other."[1]

Thus much we have said of that contention upon which we may piously meditate, and which we may conceive had some real counterpart in heavenly things.

CHAPTER III.

Of the Life of the Virgin Mary, and her Seven Petitions.

Concerning the life of the Virgin, through whom the Incarnation was wrought, we may make one meditation. You may imagine her, in the third year of her age, as offered by her parents in the Temple to God, and then as being continuously there until her fourteenth year.[2] But of what happened during that period, we should not be left in ignorance, if we accepted the account in the following revelation, which, it is said, was vouchsafed to S. Elizabeth. Among other things, it is reported that these details were told her:—"When," said the Virgin, "my father and my mother left

[1] Ps. lxxxv. 10. [2] S. John Damascenus, and Nicephorus.

me in the Temple, I decreed in my heart to take God for my Father; and I devoutly and frequently considered what I might do to render myself pleasing in His sight, that He might vouchsafe to grant me His grace; and I made myself learn the law of my God. But of all the precepts of the Divine Law, there were three precepts which I most of all preserved in my heart; viz. 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength;' also, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself;' also, 'Thou shalt hate the enemies of thy soul.' These I kept, indeed, in my mind, and at once all the virtues comprised in them I possessed, and so I wish you to do. But the soul cannot have any virtue if God is not loved with all the heart; for from that love flows the fulness of all grace, and without it no grace can flow into the soul, nor can it abide in it. So will it also run away like water, unless the soul hates its enemies; that is, its vices and sins. He who desires, therefore, to have and to retain grace within him, must order aright the passions of love and hatred. I would then have you do as I did. I rose, indeed, always at night, and went before the altar of the Temple, and with all the desire and longing and affection which I possessed, I sought for grace from the Almighty God to observe these three precepts, and all the other commandments of the law. And thus, whilst standing before the altar, I made these seven petitions to the Lord:—

"First, indeed, I asked for the grace, whereby I might be able to fulfil the precept of love; viz. to 'love the Lord with all the heart,' etc.

"Secondly, I asked for grace, that I might be able to love my neighbour, according to His will and good pleasure, and that I might love all things which He loves and chooses.

"Thirdly, I asked for grace, that I might hate and avoid all things which He hates.

"Fourthly, I asked for lowliness, patience, gentleness, and meekness, and for all virtues which might render me more pleasing in His sight.

"Fifthly, I besought Him to let me see the time when that blessed Virgin should be born, who should bring forth the Son of God, and that He would preserve my sight, that I might see her; my tongue, that I might praise her; my hands, that I might serve her; my feet, that I might go to minister to her; my knees, that I might adore the Son of God on her lap.

"Sixthly, I sought for grace, to obey the precepts and directions of the High Priest of the Temple.

"Seventhly, I prayed that the Temple and all the people of God might be preserved for His service."

The handmaid of Christ, when she had heard this, exclaimed, "O most amiable lady, are not you full of grace and of virtues?"

The Blessed Virgin replied, "Know for certain, that I regard myself as guilty, as vile, as unworthy of the grace of God as you. Therefore I thus pray for grace and virtues." And again she said, "Daughter, do you imagine that all the grace which is given to me has come to me without any effort on my part? Indeed it is not so; for no grace, or gift or virtue, have I received from God without great effort, continual prayer, ardent desire, deep devotion, many tears, and much self-discipline, and without striving in every thought and deed to the best of my knowledge and power to please Him. In saying this, I except (as all must do) the first grace, which was given to me for my sanctification."[1] And she added, "Know for certain, that grace never descends into a soul, unless through prayer and mortification.

[1] Jer. i. 5; S. Luke i. 15.

But after we have rendered to God what we can, poor indeed as it is, grace comes into our soul, bearing with it His highest gifts, so that the soul seems to lose itself, and to lose its memory, and no remembrance to remain of anything said or done, as pleasing to God, and to become to itself more vile and contemptible than ever."

This we have taken from the aforesaid revelations.

S. Jerome, however, writes thus concerning the life of the Blessed Virgin :—"The Blessed Virgin made for herself this rule, that she should continue in prayer from the morning to the third hour; that she should occupy herself in outward work from the third to the ninth hour; and from the ninth hour again she returned to prayer, and did not cease from it, until (it is said) the angel appeared to her from whose hand she was accustomed to receive her food, and through converse with whom she increased in the service and love of God. It came to pass, that at vigils she was the first; that she excelled in the wisdom of the Divine Law; that she was remarkable for lowliness; that she sang most sweetly the psalms of David; that she was most glorious in charity; that she was most chaste in purity, most perfect in every virtue. She was constant and firm, and when in contact with variableness in others, no one ever saw her or heard her angry. Her every word was so full of grace, that the Presence of God was made evident through her tongue. She continued constantly in prayer and in the study of the law of God. She was ever anxious about her companions, lest any of them should sin in word, or burst forth with inordinate laughter, or lest any one should offend an equal by violence and pride. She unceasingly blessed God; and lest perchance the greetings which she bestowed upon others who saluted her should in any way detract from the praises of God, she made it a custom to reply, 'Thanks be to God.' Thus the habit of

holy persons saluting one another by the words 'Thanks be to God,' gained ground. The food which the angel is said to have given to her she received; and that which from the High Priest of the Temple she accepted, she gave to the poor. Daily this angel was said to converse with her, and to obey her as if she were a very dear sister or mother."

Thus far S. Jerome.

In her fourteenth year, the Blessed Virgin Mary, according to tradition, was espoused to Joseph, through Divine revelation, and returned to Nazareth; the details of this event you may find in the legend of her birth. Such things we may conceive of as happening before the Incarnation of the Lord Jesus. You should ruminate upon them, and draw delight from them, as at least the expression of a devout mind, and copy that devotion which is so conspicuous throughout them. Now let us proceed to the Mystery of the Incarnation.

CHAPTER IV.

Concerning the Incarnation of Christ.

After that "the fulness of time"[1] was come, and the Sovereign Trinity had deliberated on the means of providing for the recovery of mankind, by the Incarnation of the Word, on account of the great love with which He loved[2] the human race; moved by His mercy (the heavenly spirits, too, eagerly desiring it) Almighty God, when the Blessed Virgin had returned to Nazareth, summoned the Archangel Gabriel. Imagine him thus addressed:—"Go to our most beloved

[1] Gal. iv. 4. [2] Eph. ii. 4.

daughter, Mary, who is espoused to Joseph, and above all creatures most dear to Us; and tell her that My Son 'greatly desires her beauty' and hath chosen her to be His mother. And desire her to receive Him joyfully, because through her instrumentality I have decreed that the salvation of the whole human race should be effected, and I will remember their offence against Me no more."

Give your attention to this point, and remember what I said to you in the beginning; viz., learn in all that is said and done, to imagine yourself to be actually present. Here you can conceive of God, as far as may be, as a pure Spirit; regard Him at any rate as a great King, seated on His high Throne, having a benign, kind, and fatherly look, longing to reconcile us to Himself or to be reconciled to us, and saying these words; Gabriel at the same time with bright and cheerful face, with bended knees, with downcast and reverential look, listening attentively to the message of his Lord. Then Gabriel, rising brightly and exultingly, speeds away from the heavenly regions, and quick as thought appears in human guise before the Virgin Mary, who was in the inner chamber of her little dwelling. But although his flight was so rapid, that God who is omnipresent had preceded him, for he found the Holy Trinity there when he came.

For you should know that the great Work of the Incarnation was the Work of the Whole Trinity, although the Person of the Son Alone became incarnate. As when one puts on a coat, and two standing at the sides help him, and hold the sleeves of the coat. Here then be very attentive, and as if present at the mystery itself, consider all that is said and done. O what material for meditation may not now be found in that humble dwelling, where such persons are present, and such actions are accomplished! For although the Holy Trinity is everywhere present, yet in this place and at this time you may regard Him as especially present, by reason of His

singular operation. The angel Gabriel, then, the faithful friend of the Bridegroom, having entered, we may represent him to ourselves as thus addressing the Virgin Mary: "Hail! highly favoured, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women."[1] But she being disturbed, made no reply. Her disturbance was not from guilty confusion, nor from the angelic apparition, for with such sights she is supposed to have been familiar, but according to the words of the Evangelist, "she was troubled at his saying," as she considered the novelty of this salutation—so different from his accustomed mode of greeting her. When in this salutation she saw that she was in three ways commended, the lowly Virgin could not but be disturbed. For she was commended because she was full of grace, because the Lord was with her, and as blessed above all women; but the humble cannot hear commendation without shame and confusion of face. She was troubled then from a virtuous and proper bashfulness. Moreover, she was somewhat afraid to give credence to what had been told her; not that she distrusted the angel's veracity, but because it is the mark of the humble, not to examine their virtues but to dwell on their defects, that so they may make continual progress by reputing their virtue to be little, and their defects very great. As therefore a prudent, cautious, fearful, and bashful maid, she was silent. For what could she have answered? Learn, then, from her example to love silence and quietness, for it is a virtue of great price and utility. The angel twice had spoken before she made any reply, for talkativeness in a maiden is an abomination. Then the angel, understanding the cause of her doubt, said, "Fear not, Mary," nor be abashed by the praises I have declared to you, for they are true; for thou art not only full of grace, but art to be an instrument for restoring grace to all mankind, and hast found

[1] S. Luke i. 28.

favour with God. For behold, thou shalt conceive, and bring forth the Son of the Highest, Who hath chosen thee for His mother, and Who will save all who trust in Him. Then she replied, not, however, admitting or denying the praises which were bestowed on her, but wishing to be informed concerning the manner of the mystery, about which she was much in doubt, whether she should cease to be a virgin. Therefore she inquired of the angel, "How shall this be"—perhaps she had dedicated her virginity most firmly to her God—"seeing I know not a man?"[1] And the angel said, "It shall be done through the operation of the Holy Ghost, who shall fill thee in a singular manner, and thou shalt conceive by His power, and thy virginity be preserved; and therefore thy son shall be called the Son of God. For nothing is impossible with Him. Thy cousin Elizabeth hath also conceived a son in her old age through the power of God, and this is the sixth month with her who was barren."

Here regard yourself in the Presence of God, and consider how the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity awaited the answer and consent of Their beloved child, lovingly and complacently beholding her bashful demeanour and expression. See, too, how diligently and wisely the angel induces her, ordering his words, standing with reverent posture before the Virgin, with calm and placid countenance, faithfully fulfilling his embassy, and attentively listening to the words of her reply, that he may be able to convey them, and in this wonderful work to carry out the will of God. And how did she stand, reverently and humbly, and with bashful look, receiving the angel's unexpected message without elation or thought of self! And when she heard these great tidings about herself, such as none other ever heard, she ascribed the whole to Divine grace. Learn, then, from

[1] S. Luke i. 34.

her example to be modest and humble, because without these virginity is of little value. With great prudence the Virgin then rejoices, and having heard the words of the angel, gives her consent. In her revelations, she is reported to have knelt with profound devotion and with clasped hands as she said, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word." At that instant the mystery of the Incarnation was wrought, and the Son of God took her flesh, yet remained entire in the bosom of the Father. But you can piously imagine, how the Son Himself, undertaking this laborious embassy of obedience, inclined and commended Himself to the Father, in the same instant that His soul was created and infused into the womb of the Virgin. Being perfect Man, according to all the features of the body, but very small; He naturally grew as others do—His Soul as to its faculties, and His Body as to its members, being perfect from the first. For He was perfect God as well as perfect man, and as wise and powerful as He is now. Gabriel then accompanied the Blessed Virgin in her act of devotion; he knelt awhile, and then bending took his leave of her, and returning to his own country, related what had taken place, and—there was new joy there, and a new festival, and very great exultation! But the Virgin was all inflamed, and more than usually enkindled with the love of God when she became sensible that she had conceived; falling down on her knees we may depict her, as she gave thanks for so great a gift, humbly and devoutly beseeching God to instruct her, so that she might not fail in any of those things which she ought to do for her Son.

You ought then to consider how great is this day's solemnity, and to rejoice in your heart, and to keep it as a day of gladness. It is a day unheard of from the beginning of time until now. Such a day is devoted to the

honour of God the Father, who made a marriage for His Son by the espousal of human nature, which to-day the Son united inseparably to Himself. To-day is also the solemnity of the Son's nuptials, and the commencement of His life in the womb, from which He is to pass into the world. To-day is likewise sacred to the Holy Ghost, through whose wonderful and singular co-operation the work of the Incarnation was effected; and to-day He began to show His singular kindness to mankind. To-day is also the glorious solemnity of the Blessed Virgin, who has a relation to the Father, as a daughter; to the Son, as His mother; and to the Holy Ghost as in a manner a spouse. To-day is also the Festival of the whole Heavenly Court, because the gap in their ranks began to be repaired. But more especially is this day the Festival of the human race, because salvation and redemption date from it, and the reconciliation, exaltation, and deification of humanity. On this day the Son received the new command from the Father, that He should accomplish our salvation. On this day, coming forth from the highest heaven, "He rejoiced as a giant to run His course,"[1] and entered into the garden of the Virgin's womb. On this day also, He was made one of us and our brother, and began to sojourn among us. To-day from Heaven the true Light descended, to remove and chase away the clouds of darkness. On this day the living bread, which giveth life unto the world, was as it were prepared for us in the vessel of the Virgin's womb. To-day, "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us."[2] To-day, the cries and desires of Patriarchs and Prophets were heard and fulfilled. They gave what vent they could to their inexpressible longings in such words as these: "Send ye the Lamb;"[3] and again: "Drop down, ye heavens, from above;"[4] and again "O that thou wouldest rend the heavens and come down;"[5]

[1] Ps. xix. 5. [2] S. John i. 14. [3] Is. xvi. 1.
[4] Is. xlv. 8. V. [5] Is. xiv 1.

and again: "Bow Thy heavens, O Lord, and come down;"[1] and again: "Show us Thy Countenance, O Lord;"[2] and with similar acts of desire, of which the Scriptures are full, for this day was most ardently expected. This day is the beginning and foundation of all solemnities, and the source of all our good. For hitherto the Lord had been wroth with man on account of the transgression of his first parents, but now beholding His Son made man, His anger was turned away. This day is called "the fulness of time." You see a wonderful work and most solemn mystery accomplished, in which all is sweet, all desirable, all to be received with devotion, solemnized with transports of joy and exultation, and worthy of the deepest veneration. Meditate, then, on these things, delight and take pleasure in them; and perhaps the Lord will grant you a deeper insight into them, etc.

CHAPTER V.

How the Blessed Virgin visited Elizabeth; and how the "Magnificat" and "Benedictus" were composed.

After this, the Blessed Virgin, recalling the words of the angel concerning her cousin Elizabeth, resolved to visit her with a view to congratulating her, and also of offering her services to her. Whereupon she went, together with her husband, Joseph, from Nazareth towards her cousin's house, which was fourteen or fifteen miles distant from Jerusalem, or thereabouts. She was not deterred either by the roughness of the road or by the length of the journey, but went "with haste,"[3] being unwilling to be seen long in public.

[1] Ps. cxliv. 5. [2] Ps. lxxx. 3. [3] S. Luke i. 39.

Her condition was not burdensome to her, as it ordinarily is in such states. Picture to yourself, then, how she journeyed with her husband, not as a queen, borne amidst an escort of soldiers or barons, nor with an assembly of courtly ladies in attendance, but simply on foot. She was accompanied, however, with poverty, humility, and modesty, and a train of honourable virtues; but not with the pomp and vanity of the world. And when she reached the house and entered it, she saluted Elizabeth, saying, we may suppose, "Hail, my sister Elizabeth." Whereupon Elizabeth, exulting and in transports of joy, and enkindled by the Holy Ghost, arises and embraces her most tenderly, and exclaimed with joy, "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"[1] And no sooner had the Virgin saluted Elizabeth, than both John in the womb and his mother were filled with the Holy Ghost. Nor is the mother filled before the son, but the son, first filled, then fills the mother; not operating anything in the soul of the mother, but effecting that something should be wrought in her by the Holy Ghost, insomuch as the grace of the Holy Ghost was more affluently diffused in him, and he first became conscious of his grace. Thus, as she was sensible of Mary's presence, so was he conscious of the approach of the Lord; and thus he leapt for joy, and she prophesied.

Consider what great force there is in the Virgin's words, for which a special communication of the Spirit was given. For she was so abundantly filled with the Holy Ghost, that from her He overflowed to others. And Mary replied to Elizabeth, and said, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour," and the rest of that sweet song of praise. Then, preparing to sit,

[1] S. Luke i. 42, 43.

picture the most lowly Virgin taking the lowest place at the feet of Elizabeth; but Elizabeth, quickly rising, will not allow this, and placed her by her side. Mutual inquiries about the mysteries which were wrought in them followed, and they joyously congratulated each other, and together praised God for their privileges, and gave Him thanks, and so passed those joyous days. The Virgin remained there about three months, ministering to and serving Elizabeth as far as she was able, humbly, reverently, and devoutly, as if forgetful that she was to become the mother of our Lord, and was of queenly dignity. O what a home, what a roof, what a resting-place was that which was occupied by such mothers about to bring forth such sons: Mary and Elizabeth, Jesus and John! There, too, are those grand old men, Zachariah and Joseph.

When her time was fully come, Elizabeth brought forth her son, which Mary received, and carefully attended to. The little one, it is said, as if intelligent, gazed on her, and when she delivered him to his mother, still turned towards her, as if he could delight in her alone, while she delighted in playing with him, and embraced and sweetly kissed him. Consider the greatness of John. No one had ever had such a nurse; many other great privileges were his, on which at present I will not dwell.

On the eighth day the boy was circumcised, and was called John. And then was opened the mouth of Zacharias, and he prophesied, saying, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel," etc. Thus in that house were composed those two most beautiful canticles, the "Magnificat" and the "Benedictus." But the Virgin, it may be, stood by a sort of curtain, so as not to be seen by those who were present at the ceremony of Circumcision, and listened attentively to the canticle in which mention was made of her son, and most prudently hid all those things in her heart. Then, bidding

Elizabeth, Zacharias, and John farewell, she returned to her own home in Nazareth. In this return contemplate again her poverty. She returns to a house in which neither bread, nor wine, nor any other necessary was to be found. And she had no possessions or money from which she might supply her needs. The three months during which she had remained with her relations were probably passed in comparative comfort; but now she returns to poverty, and has to labour with her own hands to gain a livelihood. Compassionate her, and be inflamed with a love of poverty.

CHAPTER VI.

How Joseph willed to put away Mary; and how God permits His Faithful Servants to be Afflicted.

But when the Blessed Virgin and her spouse, Joseph, had dwelt together, and her condition had become evident, Joseph was grieved beyond measure when he perceived it. Give your best attention here, for you will be able to learn many fair lessons. If you are surprised that the Lord willed that His mother should be espoused, and yet willed that she should ever continue a virgin, there are three reasons to be assigned for such a course. First, that her state might not expose her to infamy; secondly, that she might be provided with the loving services and society of her husband; thirdly, that the mystery of the Divine Conception might be veiled from the Devil.

Joseph again and again regarded his spouse, and was grieved and disturbed, and turned away with confusion of face as if averting his eyes from a criminal, suspecting her

to be guilty of adultery. You see how God suffers His people to be harassed by tribulations and tempted, in preparing them for their crown.

Joseph was turning over in his mind what course he should pursue, and resolved to put away his wife privately. Truly about this it may be said, that his praise is in the Gospel; for it is said there that he was a just man, and here we have the mark of great virtue. For it is commonly admitted, that the greatest cause of shame, sorrow, and anger which a man can have is the unfaithfulness of his wife; and yet Joseph restrained himself by virtue, and was unwilling to accuse his wife, patiently letting this great injury pass, not avenging himself, but yielding to goodness and piety. He resolved to put her away secretly.

Nor was the Blessed Virgin exempted from this trial, for she saw her husband's concern, and she was troubled for his sake. Nevertheless she kept silence, and in her lowliness concealed the gift of God. She preferred to be accounted vile herself than to divulge the Divine secret, and to tell that about herself which might have the appearance of vanity. But she besought the Lord that He would deign to provide some remedy, and remove this trial from her husband and herself. Observe how great this affliction and perplexity was to them both, but the Lord sent relief; for an Angel came to Joseph, and told him in a dream that his wife had conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, and that he was trustfully and joyfully to remain with her. Then, all anxiety ceasing, intense comfort followed. And thus will it happen to all, if only when they are in tribulation they know how to preserve patience; for after a storm God sends a calm. Nor ought you to doubt that God permits trials to come to His own people, only with a view to their profit.

Joseph then inquired about this marvellous Conception,

and the Virgin faithfully related the particulars of it to him; and he remained with her thenceforward, rejoicing in the society of his blessed spouse. No words can express with how chaste a love he loved her, and how faithfully he ministered to her; and the Blessed Virgin trusted herself to him, and joyfully shared his low estate.

Then the Lord Jesus remained in His mother's womb nine months, as others do, patiently and benignly waiting until the due time arrived. We ought much to compassionate Him, reduced to such a depth of lowliness. How ought we then to exert ourselves to obtain this virtue; nor should we ever yield to pride or to the inflation of self-conceit, seeing that the Lord of Majesty has stooped so low! And for this second proof of His love, in being so long a captive for us, how can we ever sufficiently requite Him? At least let us heartily acknowledge it, and with the utmost affection give Him thanks for having chosen us out of the rest of mankind, to make Him the slender return of giving up the love of the world in order to devote ourselves to His service. Indeed, it is from no merit of our own, but from His goodness, that we can live to Him; yet this life is highly acceptable to Him, and a praiseworthy service. Our life of retirement from the world is not for punishment, but for safety. In the harbour of Religion we are safely sheltered, for thither neither the poisoned darts of this wicked world, nor the storms of its tempestuous sea, can reach us, save through our own temerity. Let us, then, endeavour as much as possible, by withdrawing our minds from all transitory things, to gain purity of heart; for bodily seclusion is of little or no avail, unless the mind be also withdrawn from the world.

Learn, then, to compassionate our Lord Jesus, who was in continual affliction from the moment of His Conception unto His Death, because He knew that His Father,

Whom He loved supremely, would be forsaken by sinners and dishonoured for the sake of idols; and He saw with the pity which He had for souls created in His own image, those souls miserably and on all sides plunged in ruin, and this was a greater pain to Him than His bodily sufferings. For to save them from this He endured His Passion. See, then, what a delightful feast is set before you; if you wish to enjoy its sweetness, dwell on these things diligently and often.

CHAPTER VII.

On the Birth of Jesus Christ, etc.

THE term of nine months being then ended, a decree went forth from the Emperor, that all the world should be taxed, each in his own city. Then Joseph, purposing to go into his own city, Bethlehem, and knowing that the time of his wife's delivery was at hand, took her with him. Here, again, the Virgin undertakes a long journey, for Bethlehem is but five or six miles distant from Jerusalem. They took with them, tradition says, an ox and an ass, and travelled as poor cattle-dealers. And when they reached Bethlehem, because they were poor, and the place was crowded by those who had come for the same purpose, "there was no room for them in the inn."[1] Here compassionate the Virgin and regard her, young and delicate, as one at the age of fifteen would be, fatigued with the long journey, abashed in the midst of the crowd, and in vain seeking a shelter; and being everywhere roughly rejected, she and her husband

[1] S. Luke ii. 7.

obliged to take refuge in a sort of wayside shed, the mere shelter of persons who are overtaken by the rain. There we may suppose that Joseph, who was by trade a carpenter, might perhaps have constructed a kind of enclosure. But now most carefully attend to all I am about to relate, for these things are reported to have been revealed by the Virgin herself to a certain holy man, and one, I think, worthy of credit of our order, who told them to me.

When the hour of her delivery had arrived, on Sunday at midnight, the Virgin, rising from her seat, rested herself against a pillar which was there; Joseph sat, perhaps grieving that it was not in his power to provide what was fitting for such a time. Then he arose and took some hay out of the manger and laid it at the feet of the Virgin, and thereupon withdrew himself to another part. Then the Son of the Eternal God was born, without pain or hurt to His mother, having passed from her in an instant to the bed of hay, prepared for Him at her feet. His mother quickly stooped down and took Him into her arms, and sweetly embracing Him, laid Him on her lap; then, through the suggestion of the Holy Spirit, she began to wash and bathe Him, and her breasts were distended through the blessing of heaven; after this, she perhaps wrapt Him in her veil, and placed Him in the manger. And now the ox and ass, with bended knees, and with their heads placed over the manger, breathed upon Him, as if they were gifted with reason, and knew that their warm breath would be of service to an infant so slightly protected from the severity of the season. But His mother, kneeling down, adored, and gave thanks to God, saying, "I thank thee, Lord, Holy Father, for that Thou hast given to me Thy Son, and I adore Thee, Eternal God, and Thee—the Son of the Living God, and mine." And Joseph likewise adored Him; and taking the ass's saddle, he drew, we may

imagine, away from it the pillion of wool or leather, and placed it by the manger, that the Virgin might sit upon it. But she, seating herself there, used it for a support; and so remained that mother, who is blessed above all, gazing on the manger, having as it were no thought or love for any but for her dearest Son. Thus far we have been following the account of this revelation. After the Blessed Virgin departed, an angel is said to have lingered behind, in order to speak words in her praise, which I could neither understand nor repeat.

You have seen, then, the birth "of the Highest," you have also contemplated the delivery of the blessed mother, and you must have observed how conspicuous in both was their extreme poverty—how even necessaries were wanting to them. This exalted virtue the Lord first brought into prominence. This is that pearl in the Gospel,[1] to purchase which all was sold. This is the first foundation of the whole spiritual house; for with a load of temporal goods, the spirit cannot ascend up to God. Of this S. Francis said, "Learn, brethren, that poverty is the spiritual way of salvation; the nourishment of lowliness, and the root of perfection, the fruit of which is manifold yet hidden. Therefore it is a great shame to us that we do not embrace it with all our strength, but instead thereof we burden ourselves with unnecessary things, when the Lord of the whole world and His mother most strictly and most studiously observed it." Concerning which S. Bernard thus says, "On earth this virtue abounds, and man knows not the price thereof. This, the Son of God, desiring, came down from heaven, to choose for Himself, and to teach us how precious it is in His estimation. Adorn thy heart as a chamber for the Spouse, with lowliness and poverty. In these swaddling clothes He delights, as His mother testifies; in these

[1] S. Matt. xiii. 46.

He wills to be wrapt as though they were silks. Sacrifice the abominations of the Egyptians to thy God."[1] Thus far S. Bernard. The same writer, in a sermon on the Nativity,[2] thus begins: "Blessed be our God and Father. At length He consoles His people. Would you know who 'His people' are? The man after God's own heart tells us 'the poor committed himself to Thee.' And Christ, in the Gospel, says, 'Woe unto you that are rich, for ye have your consolation.'[3] But what can yet console those who already have their consolation? The infancy of Christ affords no consolation to the talkative; the tears of Christ are no comfort to gigglers, the swaddling clothes are no consolation to the gaudy; the stable and manger are no comfort to those who love the first seats in the synagogue. To the poor shepherds, keeping watch over their flocks, the joyful light was first announced, and unto them the Saviour was born; to the poor, to labouring men, and not to you rich, who have already your consolation and your possessions." Thus far S. Bernard.

Moreover, in this mystery of the Nativity we can contemplate the profound humility of the Son of God and of His mother. They did not disdain a stable for their dwelling, nor the cattle, hay, and other mean things which were around them. This virtue, in all its acts, both our Lord and His mother most perfectly observed, and thereby commended it to us. Let us strive, then, to do all in our power to embrace it; for without it there is no salvation, because whatever we do when it is mixed with pride cannot please God. According to S. Augustine, pride turned Angels into devils; humility turns men into Angels. And S. Bernard says,[4] "What kind of man ought he, think you, to be, who is chosen to fill the place of a lost Angel?

[1] Serm. i. Vig. Nat. Dom. [2] Serm. v. [3] S. Luke vi. 24.
[4] Ser. ii. de Verb. Is. vi.

Pride once disturbed that kingdom, shook its walls, partly threw them down, and no small part of them too. What then follows? Would not that pest be abominated by the inhabitants most of all? Be assured, brethren, that He who spared not the proud Angels will not spare men. God will not be inconsistent with Himself."

Then you can consider in the Son of God and His mother, but mostly in the infant Jesus, the heartrending sufferings of this Mystery. Of this S. Bernard speaks thus: "The Son of God at His Birth, when He had the power to choose whatever time He liked, chose that which was most painful, especially to a tender infant, the son of a poor mother, who had scarcely any clothes to cover Him, and nothing but a manger in which to cradle Him; and notwithstanding there was such urgent need for them, we hear nothing of warm furs in which to wrap Him."[1] And again, "Christ, who cannot make a mistake, chose what was most painful to the flesh. This, therefore, is best, and most profitable, and to be preferred; and whoever teaches or advises the contrary, is to be avoided as a seducer." And again, "He," brethren, "was foretold a long time before by the prophet Isaiah as the child 'who should know to refuse the evil, and choose the good.'[2] Therefore what is pleasant to the flesh is evil, what is painful is good; since that wise child, the infant Word, chose the latter, and rejected the former." Thus S. Bernard speaks. Go and do thou likewise; but act discreetly, and not exceed your power. We shall have more to say about these virtues in another place. Let us return to the scene of the Nativity.

The Lord then being born, a multitude of Angels came to worship Him, and, having adored their God, forthwith went to the shepherds, who were about a mile from Bethlehem, to announce to them the Birth of Christ and where it

[1] Ser. iii. de Nat. Dom. [2] Is. vii. 15.

took place. Thence, they went up to heaven with songs and joyous strains, announcing to their fellow-citizens the same event. Then the whole heavenly court, in raptures of joy, celebrated the mystery with pomp and praise, making acts of thanksgiving to the Eternal Father; and all who were there, according to their different orders, descend successively to see the Face of the Lord their God; and adoring Him with all reverence, and beholding His mother, they filled the air with songs of praise. For who of them, having heard these tidings, could have remained in Heaven, and not visited his Lord in His so lowly estate upon earth? This proud feeling could not have possessed one of them. And, therefore, the Apostle says, "Again, when He bringeth in the First-begotten into the world, He saith, And let all the angels of God worship Him."[1] Whatever be the truth in this matter, it is sweet to me to meditate thus on the Angels.

The shepherds came and worshipped Him, bringing tidings of what they had heard from the Angels. His most prudent mother was all the while keeping in her heart whatever she heard concerning her Child; and the shepherds departed, rejoicing on their way. Bend thy knee too, you who have lingered before this scene, worship thy Lord God, and reverence His mother, and the holy and venerable Joseph. Then kiss in spirit the Feet of the Child Jesus, as He lies on His bed of hay, and ask in spirit His mother to hold Him forth that you may receive Him into your arms; then take Him, embrace Him, attentively regard His features, kiss Him reverently, and delight in Him trustfully. This you may do, because He came into the world to save sinners, and after humbly conversing with them, left Himself to them for their food. Therefore His Benignity will patiently suffer Himself to be handled as you

[1] Heb. i. 6.

desire, and He will not ascribe it to presumption, but to love. Yet these acts must always be accompanied with reverence and fear, because He is the Holy of Holies. Then imagine that you restore Him to His mother, and carefully observe with what care and wisdom she takes charge of Him, gives Him suck, and performs other parental duties. Be ready to give your services as if you could, meditate on them, delight and rejoice in them, and with continual devotion take the posture of one who would gladly, with the Blessed Mother, minister to the Child Jesus, and often gaze upon that Face which angels desire to look upon.[1] But always, as I repeat, with reverence and fear, that you may not suffer a repulse; for you ought to regard yourself as unworthy to converse with Him.

You ought also to contemplate with joy, how great is this day's solemnity. For to-day Christ was born, and, therefore, it is truly the Birthday of the Eternal King and of the Son of the Living God. This day "unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given."[2] This day the Sun of Righteousness, which was before under a cloud, shone forth brightly. This day the Holy Spirit, Head of the Church of the elect people, came forth as a bridegroom out of His chamber. This day He who is fairer than the sons of men, showed His face, so long desired. This day first was made that angelic hymn, "Glory to God in the highest."[3] This day peace was announced to men, according to the same hymn. This day, as the Church throughout the whole world sings, "the heavens distilled honey, and the angels sang on earth."[4] This day the kindness and goodness of God our Saviour first appeared.[5] This day God is adored in the likeness of sinful flesh. This day these two miracles happened which surpass all understanding, and which can

[1] 1 Pet. i. 12. [2] Is. ix. 6. [3] Luke ii. 14.
[4] The office of the Nativity in the Breviary. [5] Tit. iii. 4.

be apprehended only by faith; namely, God is born, and a Virgin brings forth. This day a multitude of other miracles took place. In short, all that has been written about the Incarnation shone brightly forth; and whatever was before commenced, was only now manifested, and therefore it is permissible to add to these meditations, passages which do not coincide in point of time and yet bear upon the subject. It is evident, then, that this day is one of public rejoicing and gladness, and of great delight.[1]

CHAPTER VIII.

Of the Circumcision, and Weeping of the Lord.

The Child was circumcised on the eighth day. Two great mysteries were wrought on that day. One was the revelation of the Name of salvation, which had been given Him from all eternity, and by which the angel had said He should be called, before He was conceived in the womb—that Name this day was declared and made known. And they called His name Jesus; but Jesus means Saviour, "which Name is above every name."[2] Nor is there, as the Apostle Peter saith, any "other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."[3] The other is, that on this day it came to pass that the Lord Jesus began to shed His most sacred blood for us. Early in life did He begin to suffer for us; He who did no sin, for us to-day began to bear the penalty of sin. Call out compassion for Him, and weep with Him, for to-day He wept much. In

[1] The account of some miracles follows.
[2] Phil. ii. 9. [3] Acts iv. 12.

these solemnities we have indeed great cause to rejoice at our salvation; yet we ought also to have a tender sorrow and pity on account of His anguish and sufferings. You have heard what affliction and poverty He endured at His Birth; and besides what has been mentioned, tradition says that when His mother laid Him in the manger she had nothing but a stone on which to raise His head, putting perhaps a little of the hay upon it. I had this from a devout brother who is said to have seen it, and to this day the stone appears in the wall as a memorial of this event. You can conceive with what delight that Blessed Mother would have placed a soft cushion under His head, had she one; but having nothing but a stone, with bitter grief she laid His head upon it.

And on this day you hear how He shed His Blood; for His Flesh was cut with the stony knife.[1] Ought we not, then, to be moved with compassion for Him? Yes; and assuredly for His mother too. The child Jesus cried most piteously at the sharp pain He endured in His Flesh; for His Flesh was as real and capable of suffering as that of other infants. But when He wept, think you that His mother's eyes were dry? She wept, indeed, too, on seeing Him weep as He lay upon her lap; and we may depict Him lovingly laying His hand upon her lips and face, as if imploring her not to weep, for He loved her so tenderly that He would fain dry up her tears. Similarly His mother, deeply moved at the sight of the tears of her Son, comforted Him with signs and words; for she, as a most wise mother, was able to comprehend the unspoken desires of her Son. We might imagine her saying, "My Son, if you would have me cease from weeping, cease from it yourself. For

[1] A sharp stone was used before steel knives were known; and the Jews oftentimes employed the same out of respect to tradition.—Exod. iv. 25; Joshua v. 2.

how can I but weep, if You weep?" And then out of pity for His mother, her Son may have restrained His sobs. Then His mother wiped away His tears, and pressed her face to His, and gave Him suck, and in every way, as far as she could, comforted Him. And thus she quieted Him whenever He began to cry again, which haply after the manner of infants He did, to show the misery of human nature which He had truly assumed, and to conceal Himself, that the devil might not know Him. For concerning Him the Church thus sings:—[1]

"Bitter the tears the Infant shed
Laid, straiten'd in the manger-bed."

On this day the circumcision of the flesh ceases; and we now have Baptism instead of it—a rite of greater grace and less pain. But still we ought to have the circumcision of the spirit, which consists in divesting ourselves of all that is superfluous, and which therefore commends poverty; for he alone is truly circumcised in spirit who is truly poor. This doctrine, according to S. Bernard, the Apostle delivers in few words, when he says, "Having food and raiment, let us be therewith content."[2] Spiritual circumcision ought also to extend to all the senses of the body, so that we should exercise self-restraint in seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, but, most of all, in speaking.

Talkativeness is one of the worst vices, odious to God and man, and injurious. We ought then to be circumcised in tongue; that is, speak but little, and to edification. It is a sign of levity to speak much; therefore, on the contrary, silence is a virtue, and not without cause is ordered in Religious rules. S. Gregory speaks thus on this subject: "He truly knows how to speak, who has first learnt well how to be silent; for the observance of silence is as it

[1] In the hymn "Pange Lingua." [2] 1 Tim. vi. 8.

were the proper nutriment of speech."[1] Again, in another place he says: "Those who are of a weak character, are rashly forward in speaking; for what a light fancy conceives, a lighter tongue gives out."[2] S. Bernard also says thus in a sermon on the Epiphany, which begins with the words—"In the works of the Lord." "Who knows not how much we are defiled by vain speaking, by lies, by flatteries, by words of malice or boastfulness? For all this we have need of the fifth waterpot, viz. silence, the sentinel of religion, in which lies our strength."[3] And again, in another place the same Saint says: "Idleness is the mother of frivolity, but the step-mother to virtues. Frivolous talk in the mouths of lay people become almost blasphemous in the mouths of Priests. Such jokes may sometimes be taken, but they should not be brought up again. Thou hast consecrated thy mouth for the Gospel; open it not for unseemly jokes."[4]

CHAPTER IX.

Concerning the Epiphany, or Manifestation of our Lord.

On the twelfth day after the Nativity, the Child Jesus manifested Himself to the Gentiles; that is, to the Magi, or "wise men," who were Gentiles. Be present, then, on this memorable day; for you will hardly find any other Festival so solemnly kept by the Church, with so great a variety of

[1] Hom. xi. in Ezech.
[2] Moral. v. 11.
[3] Serm. 2, in Dom. 1 Epiph.
[4] Id. de Consid. ii. 13.

Antiphons, Responsories, and Lessons, and whatever else contributes to the celebration of a Festival. Not that it is really greater than all other Festivals, but only that on this day things, many and great, were done through the Lord Jesus, and mostly concerning the Church herself.

First, on this day, the Church which is gathered from the Gentiles was received by Christ, for it was represented by the "wise men." On His Birthday Christ manifested Himself to the Jews, in the person of the shepherds;—the Jews, who, with a few exceptions, did not receive the Word of God. To-day, indeed, He manifested Himself to the Gentiles, who now form the Church of God's chosen people. Therefore this is probably the Festival of the Church herself and of faithful Christians.

Secondly, on this day, nine-and-twenty years after His Birth, the Church was espoused by and united to Him through His Baptism. And therefore on this day is joyfully sung, "This day the Church is joined to her heavenly Spouse." For in our baptism our souls are espoused to Christ, who stored up grace for us in His Baptism, and the congregation of the faithful is called the Church.

Thirdly, on this day, a year after His Baptism, He wrought His first miracle at the wedding feast,[1] which may also be taken as an image of the union between Himself and His Church. It may have been also on this day that He multiplied the loaves[2] and fishes. But the three first of these events the Church commemorates on this day, and not the last. See, then, how worthy of veneration this day is, upon which the Lord chose to work such great wonders. The Church, therefore, in consideration of the many benefits shown to her by her Spouse to-day, and desirous to manifest her gratitude for them, exalts, rejoices, and sings, and solemnizes the day with splendour.

[1] S. John ii. [2] S. John vi. 11.

Let us speak now only of the first of these events, as the others will be treated in the order in which they come in the Life of Christ. And even of the first, that is, the coming of the Magi to Christ, it is not my intention to enter upon those moral and learned expositions which by holy men have been so amply given. For how the Magi came from the East to Jerusalem, what passed between them and Herod, how the star led them, why they made that particular offering, and other things of the same kind, you will find in the text of the Gospel and the commentaries of holy men. For, as I said in the beginning, I in this and in other actions of the Life of Christ, aim at depicting a few of the scenes respecting what Christ really did, or what may be conceived as likely to have happened, and dwelling upon these from different points of view. But I purpose having as little as possible to do with the work of an expositor; both because I am incapable of it, and because it would make my work of too great length. Try, therefore, in spirit to be present now, and contemplate diligently everything that happens; because, as I have before said, in this lies the whole force of these meditations.

These three kings, then, came to Bethlehem, with a great crowd of people, and with an honourable suite, and stopped at the hovel where the Lord Jesus was born. The Blessed Virgin, hearing the noise and tumult, caught up her Child. The wise men entered the little dwelling and fell down on their knees, and worshipped the Divine Child reverently. They honour Him as King, and they worship Him as their Lord. See how great was their faith: for what was it to believe, that a little infant, so poorly clad, in the arms of so poor a mother and in such a wretched abode, without attendants, company, or any signs of state, could be their King, and very God? And yet they believed both. Such

were thought fit to be our guides and pioneers in the way of faith. See how they remain on their knees before Him! And now they converse with His mother, either through an interpreter or of themselves, for as they were wise men, perhaps they knew the Hebrew language! They questioned her concerning all things which related to the Child. The Virgin mother replies to their inquiries, and they believe all she tells them. Regard them carefully; how reverently and courtly they speak and listen. See also the Blessed Virgin, how she shrinks from their questions, and, with eyes fixed on the ground, bashfully answers—desires neither to speak nor to be seen. Yet the Lord gave her strength to deport herself fitly on this great occasion, for these worshippers represented the whole Gentile Church of the future. Then consider the Child Jesus; He does not yet speak, yet there is an air of gravity in His manner beyond His age, and as one intelligent, regards them blandly. They are much delighted with the Child, as they, inwardly taught and illumined by Him, regard Him with the eyes of their mind, and with the bodily eye see Him who was fairer than the sons of men. At length, full of joy and consolation, they open their treasures, and having spread a carpet at the Feet of the Lord Jesus, they offer Him gold, frankincense, and myrrh,[1] all of them in the greatest abundance, but more especially the gold. For had their offerings been small and of little value, they would not have "opened their treasures," because things of small value they would have entrusted to their attendants. And then perhaps they reverently and devoutly kiss His feet. Perhaps the Infant, in His great wisdom, that He might the more comfort them, and increase their love for Him, stretched out His hand for them to kiss, and therewith blessed them. Then they bowed themselves once more,

[1] S. Matt. ii. 11; Ps. xlv. 8.

took their leave, and with great joy departed, returning to their own country by another road.

But what, think you, was done with this gold, which was of so great value? Did the Blessed Virgin receive it for her use, or hoard it up? Did she purchase with it houses, lands, or a vineyard? Far otherwise; she was too great a lover of poverty for that. The Virgin mother, in her great zeal for poverty, and knowing her Son's will by an inward manifestation as well as by outward signs—for we can imagine Him turning away His face from the gold, as if despising it—gave all of it away to the poor in a few days. For to keep or carry such a sum was a burden to her. Whence it happened that when she came into the Temple she had not enough to buy a lamb as an offering for her Son, and therefore she presented only doves and pigeons, for all the money was gone. Therefore it is pious to believe that the offering of the Magi was of great value, and that the Blessed Virgin, having a zeal for poverty and being full of charity, gave it to the poor.

You have here, then, a commendation of poverty, and on these two points dwell. First, the Child Jesus and His mother received alms as needy persons; secondly, they had no mind to acquire or hoard up riches, but, on the contrary, did not even retain what was given to them, as the desire and love for poverty increased in them daily.

But have you not yet taken notice of the humility which is also here conspicuous? Surely, if you consider it, a depth of humility may be discerned in all this. There are many who are mean in their own sight, and not lifted up by the opinion of others; yet are they not willing to be thus regarded by others, nor patient under contempt or derision; neither can they bear to have their faults or the meanness of their condition exposed, lest they should be brought into contempt. Not thus acts to-day the Lord

Jesus—the Lord of all; for He desired that His poor estate should be made public before all, not to the few and the despised, but before the great and the many, before kings and all their grand retinue. And this, too, on an occasion and at a time when there was plenty of reason for alarm as to the result. For when these kings came in search of the King of the Jews, whom they likewise believed to be God, finding Him in such an abject condition, they might have thought that they were deluded and imposed upon, and have returned to their homes without faith and devotion. But this lover of humility was not deterred from giving us this example, lest for some specious reason which had the appearance of goodness, we might be led to set aside lowliness, and that we might learn from Him to be willing to appear vile in the eyes of others, and of no account.

CHAPTER X.

Of the Delay of the Blessed Virgin at the Manger.

When the wise men had been dismissed, and had left for their own country, and their offerings had been disposed of, the mother and the Child Jesus, and the venerable foster-father, still remained at the manger, waiting in that confined place patiently till the fortieth day, as if she had been an ordinary mother, and the boy Jesus had not been different from any other, and needed to observe the law.

And because they did not wish to be singular or to claim

a dispensation, they submitted to the law as others did. How many act in an opposite way, who, although they have nothing to distinguish them from every one else, claim for themselves special privileges, and love to have them, that they may be regarded with some peculiar honour; but true humility will not admit of such conduct as this. Therefore the Blessed Mother, after the manner of others, awaited the appointed day for her Purification, when she should enter into the Temple. She remained vigilant, and giving her whole attention to her dear Son. O God! with what solicitude and carefulness did she tend Him, lest any, the least, injury should affect Him! With what reverence, caution, and timorous care did she handle Him, Whom she knew to be her God and her Lord, falling on her knees when she took Him from the manger, or placed Him in it! With what pleasure, confidence, and maternal dignity did she embrace Him, kiss Him, sweetly press Him, and delight in Him whom she knew to be her Son! How often did she regard Him with a curious gaze—His face, and then the different members of His most sacred Body! How gravely and carefully she used to bind His tender limbs! For as she was most humble, so was she most prudent. Wherefore, in all the offices and services she rendered Him, she exercised the greatest care, both when He was alive or asleep, when He was an infant and as He grew up. O how joyously did she suckle Him! It cannot be supposed that she felt no more pleasure than an ordinary mother, when she gave Him her breast. And S. Bernard would have us believe, that S. Joseph used often to take the Child Jesus on his knees, lovingly smiling at Him.

Let us, then, remain with the Blessed Virgin at the manger, and delight ourselves again and again with the Child Jesus, for virtue goes out from Him. Every faithful soul, and especially every religious person, ought, from

Christmas Day to the Purification, at least once a day to visit in spirit that manger in company with the Blessed Mother, to adore the Child Jesus, and meditate affectionately on the poverty, humility, and goodness both of Jesus and of her.

CHAPTER XI.

Concerning the Purification of the Blessed Virgin.

The fortieth day having arrived, as prescribed by the law, the Blessed Mother, with the Child Jesus and St. Joseph, went from Bethlehem to Jerusalem, a distance of five or six miles, in order to present the Child to the Lord, according to the law.[1] Go thou with them, and in spirit help to carry the Child; be present and regard attentively everything that takes place—every word and act, for it is a mystery of sublime devotion. They bring, then, the Lord of the Temple to the Temple of the Lord.[2] When they entered the Temple court, they bought a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons to offer for Him, the customary offering for the poor. But as they were very poor, it is more likely that the pigeons were their only offering, being of less price than the doves, and therefore mentioned last in the law, and the Evangelist makes no mention of the lamb, which was the offering of the rich. And behold, just Simeon came into the Temple by the Spirit, that, according to a promise he had received, he might see the Lord's Christ. Wherefore he came with haste into the Temple to see Him, and he knew Him by the spirit of prophecy which was in Him, and at once fell down before Him, and adored Him in His

[1] Lev. xii. [2] S. Luke ii. 22.

mother's arms. The Infant it may be blessed him, and made gestures, implying that He desired to go to him; which, when His mother knew, though full of wonder, she delivered Him to Simeon. But he joyfully and reverently took Him up in his arms, and arose and blessed God, saying, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace," etc.[1] He also prophesied concerning His Passion. And Anna, a prophetess, likewise came in at that instant, and, worshipping Him, spoke many things of Him. But Mary, wondering at these things, hid them all in her heart. Then the Child Jesus, stretching forth His hands, returned to His mother. After this, they go to the altar, making a procession, a commemoration of which is made in the Church on this day throughout the world. Those two venerable old men, Joseph and Simeon, led the way, hand in hand, singing, in a transport of joy, the Psalms, "O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is gracious, and His mercy endureth for ever. The Lord is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works. For this God is our God for ever and ever. We wait for Thy lovingkindness, O God, in the midst of Thy Temple."[2] They were followed by the royal mother, bearing Jesus in her arms, Anna accompanying her by her side—she filled with reverent joy, and pouring forth praises to the Lord beyond expression. Here the procession ended; but few formed it, but those few embrace all, for human life in all its phases is represented by them. Here are male and female, old men and young, virgins and widows. And when they had reached the altar, the mother knelt reverently, and offered her dearest Son to His Father, saying, "Receive, O most glorious Father, Thy only-begotten Son, Whom, according to the commandment of Thy law, I offer to You, because He is the first-born of

[1] S. Luke ii. 29.
[2] Ps. cxviii. 1; cxlv. 17; xlviii. 14, 9.

His mother. But I beseech Thee, O Father, to restore Him to me again." Then rising, she laid Him upon the altar.

O God! what an offering is this; never had such been made from the beginning of time, nor ever shall be again. Consider every circumstance carefully. The Boy Jesus is placed upon and remains on the altar, as any other little child, and regards His mother and those around Him with a steady gaze, humbly and patiently awaiting what further had to be done. The priests are then introduced into the Temple, and the Lord of all things is redeemed like a slave for five shekels—the usual sum, the shekel being a small coin. When Joseph had paid this to the priest, the mother joyfully received back her Son. Then Joseph gave her the aforesaid birds, that she might present them; and she, kneeling down, and holding them in her hands, raised her eyes towards heaven and offered them, saying, "Receive, O most merciful Father, this oblation, this small gift, the first which Thy Child to-day presents unto Thee, of His extreme poverty." Then the Child Jesus we may think of as stretching forth His hands towards the birds, and raising His eyes towards heaven; and though He did not speak, yet by His gestures seeming to unite with His mother in offering them, and so they placed them on the altar.

You have seen, then, the dignity of those who make this offering, namely, the mother and the Son. Could, then, such an offering, although small, be rejected? God forbid; but rather may we imagine that it was borne up to the highest heaven by the hands of angels, and there presented, and graciously accepted, amid the joyful acclamations of the Heavenly Court.

After this, the holy Virgin departed from Jerusalem, and paid a visit at the house of Elizabeth, as she desired to see John before she left those parts. Go again in spirit with

her, and assist her in carrying the Blessed Child. When she had come to the house of Elizabeth, they had great joy in meeting each other, and especially in beholding the boys. And the children rejoiced together; and John, as if conscious of the dignity of Jesus, behaved with becoming reverence. You, too, receive John with respect (for he is great in the sight of the Lord), that you may perchance gain some blessing. And when they had remained some days, they departed, and journeyed towards Nazareth. And here, would you learn from all that has been said, the lesson of lowliness and poverty, you can easily do so by dwelling upon the offering, the redemption of the Child, and this strict observance of the laws.

CHAPTER XII.

Of our Lord's Flight into Egypt.

As they were pursuing their journey towards Nazareth, not as yet knowing the Divine counsels, and that Herod was planning the death of the Child Jesus, the Angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, and bade him flee into Egypt with the Child and His mother, because Herod sought to take away the Child's life. And Joseph arose from sleep and awoke the Blessed Mother, and told her of the dream. She arose with haste, and proposed starting off at once, for her inmost soul was stirred by the Angel's warning, and she would neglect nothing that might contribute to the safety of her Son. Accordingly that very night they set out towards Egypt. Observe them, and follow them in meditation; picture them taking up the Child Jesus, still asleep;

feel for them, and watch intently all that passes, for there is much that is worthy of deep consideration.

And first, reflect on the vicissitudes of prosperity and adversity which our Lord experienced in His own person. And when the like changes happen to you, be patient; for every mountain has a valley near it. For behold at His Birth Christ was glorified by the shepherds as God; and then a very little while after His Birth, He was circumcised, as if a sinner. Then came the wise men and honoured Him greatly—He all the while remaining in a stable amongst cattle, and crying like the child of any poor man. Next we find Him presented in the Temple and extolled by Simeon and Anna, and then He is bidden by the angel to flee into Egypt. You may discover in His Life many instances of a similar alternation, which, with a little adaptation, may provide us with instruction. When, therefore, you are receiving comfort, look out for affliction; and when afflicted, expect comfort. We ought not, then, to be elated by the one, nor depressed by the other. For the Lord sprinkles our sorrows with consolations, to sustain hope, lest we should be overborne; and He sends afflictions to keep us humble, that, being reminded of our misery, we might always stand in fear. Let us consider how all these things were done by our Lord for our instruction, and that Satan might not recognize Him.

In the second place, with regard to Divine benefits and consolations, observe, that he who experiences them ought not to set himself up against him who does not experience them; and he who does not experience them, ought not to yield to dejection, nor yet to envy. I ask you to notice, that the angel held converse with Joseph, and not with the Blessed Mother, although she was so much the greater of the two. Further, when we see that Joseph, so great in the sight of God, was vouchsafed an angelic visit, not openly,

but in a dream, ought we to be ungrateful and murmur when we are favoured with the gifts of God, although it may be they are not bestowed in the way we would have them?

Thirdly, consider how the Lord permits His people to be troubled by persecutions and tribulations. For great, indeed, must have been the trial to the Blessed Mother and to Joseph, to find that they sought to take away the Child's life. What news could be more painful? It was, I repeat, a great trial to them; for although they knew that He was the Son of God, yet their natural feelings could not but be disturbed, and prompt them to cry out, "O Lord God Almighty, why is it necessary that Thy Son should thus flee into Egypt? Art Thou not able to defend Him here?" Moreover, there was additional trial in this, that they were obliged to take refuge in a distant and unknown country, to travel on rough roads, when unfit to bear fatigue; the Blessed Virgin, because of her youth, and Joseph, on account of his age. The Child also Himself whom they carried was hardly two months old; and they had to dwell in a strange land in a state of extreme poverty. All these things form a very real trial. You, then, when you are tried, have patience, and do not expect to be exempt from trials, from which neither Christ Himself nor His mother were dispensed.

Fourthly, consider His benignity. See how soon and how patiently He suffers persecution, and banishment from His native country, and so meekly yields to the fury of the oppressor rather than destroy him in a moment. Profound indeed is this humility, and great this patience! He will not retaliate, or attempt to injure His enemy, but avoids his snares by withdrawing from him. We should act in the same way towards such as abuse us, despitefully use us and persecute us. Instead of seeking to revenge ourselves upon them, let us assume the attitude of patience, avoid their

fury, and what is more, pray for them, as our Lord teaches elsewhere in the Gospel.[1] The Lord, then, fled from the face of His slave, or, to speak more truly, the Devil's slave. His mother, so tender and young, and S. Joseph, so advanced in years, carried the Divine Child through a wild, dark, woody, uneven, lonely, tedious road; a journey which would be twelve or fifteen days' post for a courier to accomplish, but which they would require two months or more to perform. For they travelled, tradition says, through that desert through which the children of Israel passed, and in which they wandered forty years. But how could they carry provisions with them? Where, too, and in what way, could they find rest at night and shelter? For there are very few houses to be found in that desert. Feel pity for them, then, for this journey must have been painful, toilsome, and long, both to themselves and to the Child Jesus; go in spirit with them, and help them to carry the Child, and desire to minister to them in whatever way may be in your power. It ought not to seem a hardship to bear some affliction for ourselves, when so much has been borne for us by others—and by what others!—and so often. But concerning what happened in the desert and on the way, I will not dwell, because few of those details are well authenticated. When they entered into Egypt, all the idols of that country are said to have fallen in pieces, as Isaiah had prophesied.[2] They journeyed, it is said, as far as Heliopolis, and there renting a little house, they dwelt for seven years, as strangers and foreigners, in a poor and needy condition.

And here there is scope for many beautiful, pious, and tender reflections. Consider attentively what follows. Whence, and in what manner, did they gain their livelihood for so long a time? Did they do nothing but beg? It is said that the Virgin gained what was necessary for herself and

[1] S. Matt. v. 44. [2] Is. xix. 1.

Son by her distaff and needle, by sewing and weaving; and thus this queenly mother and lover of poverty passed her time. Much indeed in every way did they love poverty, and preserved their affection for it unimpaired even to the end of their lives. Perhaps she went from house to house asking for work; for how should it become known in the neighbourhood that she wanted employment, unless she herself made it known, for the women who had work to be done could not have divined her wish to undertake it? And when Jesus began to be about five years of age, might He not have carried messages for His mother, and gone about in quest of work for her, for she could have had no one else to go on errands? And again, might He not have taken back the work when done, and waited for part of the money to be paid? How would they both blush, the Child Jesus, the Son of the most High God, in being sent, and the mother in sending Him! But what if, sometimes when He had given up the work, and asked for payment, some proud, contentious, and abusive woman insulted Him, taking from His hands His mother's labours, and then driving Him without payment from the doors, so that He arrived home empty-handed? How many and how great insults are offered to poor strangers, all of which the Lord came on earth, not to avoid, but to undergo! What if sometimes He returned home hungry, as children become, and asked for bread which His mother was unable to give Him? What must have been the anguish of her soul on these and similar occasions! She would comfort her Son with tender words, and labour to gain food for Him, and perchance sometimes secretly withdraw a little from her own share, to reserve it for Him. These and similar incidents in the infancy of Jesus you may meditate upon, as I have suggested. The thoughts which I have given, you should extend and work out, becoming little with the Little One, and not contemning

little matters which some may think too puerile for meditation. These little things seem to me capable of helping devotion, increasing love, inflaming fervour, exciting compassion, strengthening purity and simplicity, nourishing solid lowliness and poverty, preserving familiarity with virtues, leading us to imitate them, and of stimulating hope. For we cannot lift ourselves up to the high things of God, but "the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men."[1] Such subjects of meditation do away with pride, weaken covetousness, and confound curiosity. Do you see, then, how much good may be derived from these considerations? Become, as I have already said, little with the Little One, and grow with His growth, but always without prejudice to humility; go after Him whithersoever He goes, and live ever in His Presence.

But have you yet realized how laborious their poverty must have been, how great their bashfulness? And if they were obliged to seek food by manual labour, what shall we say of clothing? What, too, about furniture—for instance, beds, and other household conveniences? Think you that they had two of anything, or anything superfluous, or anything only for ornament? No; such things are contrary to poverty, and although the Blessed Virgin might have had them, as a lover of poverty, she would not. Or again, do you imagine, that with her needle, or in other ways, she employed her time in making embroidery which might minister to the love of dress? Far be it from her. Such employments suit those who have time to waste. She was, indeed, in too great necessity to spend time in vanities; neither would she have done so, if her circumstances had been different. For this is a pernicious form of idleness, and especially in these our times. And would you know why? Hear, then. First, because by this the time which was given

[1] 1 Cor. i. 25.

to be used for the glory of God, is spent upon trifles contrary to that end. For this curious kind of work takes up more time than it is worth, which is itself a considerable evil. Secondly, because it is apt to minister to vanity in those who do it. Oh, how often do they look at it, turn it over in their mind, and reflect how this or that should be, even when their fingers are not at work upon it! And even when they should be occupied with divine things, their mind is running on the beauty of their workmanship, on the satisfaction they feel, and on the renown they will get from it. Thirdly, because these things are an occasion of pride to those for whom they are made, for with such oil the flame of pride is fed. Plain and simple garments foster a spirit of lowliness, the opposite feed pride. Fourthly, because they are the means of withdrawing the soul from God; for, according to S. Gregory, "the more a soul delights in earthly things, the more is it weaned from the love of heavenly."[1] Fifthly, because of the lust of the eyes, one of the three sources of sin, to which all sins concerning the world are reduced, for such vanities can be of no other use but for the eyes vainly to feed upon. For as often as any one feasts his eyes with such vanities—whether worker, bearer, or wearer—so often does that person offend God. Sixthly, because in many other ways, such things are a snare and cause of falling; for the sight of them may lead to many faults, such as giving a bad example, causing covetousness, envy, criticisms, murmuring, or detraction. Think, therefore, how often God is offended, before this curious piece of workmanship has an end, and that for all these disastrous results, the worker of it is the cause. Were I, then, to ask you to do such things for me, and were you to know that I should certainly be willing to make use of them, you ought not comply, since for no cause should you consent to

[1] S. Greg. Hom. xxx. in Evang.

sin, and in every way you ought to avoid what may offend God. But how much greater is your offence, if your very motive in this work is mere complacency, a wish rather to please the creature than the Creator? For they do this who wish to be distinguished, but such works are the trappings of the world, and but abominations to God. But I wonder how any one who in purity of conscience wishes to live above the world, should venture to be occupied with these trifles, and should contaminate himself with them. You see what evils flow from these curiosities. There remains, however, one more, and that a worse one, which is that, curiosity is the very opposite of poverty; and besides this, is the mark of a light, trifling, and inconstant mind. I have dilated upon this subject, that you may be put upon your guard. From these vanities, then, flee as from a venomous serpent, neither make them nor wear them. This, however, must not be taken as a condemnation of all beautiful workmanship, and especially does not apply to work which is to be used in Divine worship; but even in that care must be taken, lest there should be some defect either as to the affection, intention, or delight, with which it is done, or as to the eagerness with which it is pursued. Of such ingenious works, S. Bernard thus speaks: "Tell me what good such vanities are to the body, or what benefit are they to the soul. For certainly you will find that such things do not profit men at all. They are but a frivolous, empty, puerile satisfaction; and I know no severer wish for those, who, leaving the peace of a sweet repose, take delight in the restlessness of such vanities, than that they should be condemned to the possession of the things after which they hankered."

But let us return to the Blessed Mother in Egypt, for we have been tempted to make a long digression about this abominable vice of curiosity. Behold her again, occupied

with her labours, sewing, knitting, and spinning; and see how humbly, faithfully, and perseveringly she toils, all the while taking the most diligent care of her Son, and of household matters, and also finding opportunities, when possible, for prayer and watching. You, then, with all affection, compassionate her, and consider, that not even did the mother of our Lord obtain the kingdom of Heaven without working for it. Perhaps, it sometimes happened, that some charitable matrons in the neighbourhood, noticing her poverty, sent her a little relief, which she received humbly and with thankfulness. And Joseph, notwithstanding his age, worked a little at his trade as a carpenter. Look, then, which way you will, there is ample material for compassion; pause a little to exercise it; then, on bended knees, ask for a blessing from the Child Jesus, and in spirit bidding Him, His mother, and S. Joseph adieu with all reverence and tears of pity, depart; not forgetting that they have to remain there as exiles from their country without a cause for seven years, and to earn their bread in a foreign land in the sweat of their brow.

CHAPTER XIII.

Of the Return of our Lord from Egypt.

For full seven years, God is said to have been a stranger in the land of Egypt, when the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Take the young Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel, for they are dead which sought the young Child's life. And he took the

young Child and His mother, and returned into the land of Israel."[1] On his arrival, he discovered that Archelaus, the son of Herod, reigned there, and he feared to go on. And through a second admonition from the angel, he retired into Galilee, to the city of Nazareth. His return was about the Feast of the Epiphany; according to the Martyrology it was on the second day.

Here again you see, for I have touched on this before, how the Lord gives His consolations and revelations piecemeal, and not all at once according to the fulness of our desires. You may notice this from two circumstances. First, because the revelation came not openly, but in a dream. Secondly, because, not on one occasion but on two, the angel instructed him as to where he was to go. According to an old commentary, God did this, because our certainty is increased by the repetition of the vision. But whether this be so or not, we ought to esteem highly every the least revelation, and be thankful for it, knowing that He always disposes all things in the way He sees to be best for us.

But now let us gather in our thoughts upon the return of our Lord, and give our whole attention to it, for it is a subject most suitable for devout meditation. Return, then, in spirit to Egypt for the sake of visiting the Child Jesus; perhaps you will find Him out-of-doors, in company with other children. Depict Him as a child, running up to you, for He is affable, kindly, and courteous. But you, fall on your knees, and kiss His Feet, and take Him up into your arms, and rest awhile with Him. Perhaps He will say to you, "We have permission to return to our country, and to-morrow we have to leave this place; you have come at a good time, for you can join us on our homeward journey." To which quickly respond, that you will be over-joyed to do

[1] S. Matt. ii. 20, 21.

so, that you wish to follow Him wheresoever He goes, and that your delight is in His society. I have already allowed that such points as these may seem puerile to some, yet frequent meditation upon them will yield much fruit, and prepare the way for higher things. Afterwards, you can imagine that He will lead you to His mother, who will honour you with a courteous reception. Pay her and her holy and aged spouse the attention which is due, and rest with them.

On the following morning, when they are ready to depart, you will see some charitable matrons, and also men, come to accompany them beyond the gates of the city, on account of their peaceful and pious mode of life whilst among them. For it may be they had spoken beforehand to their neighbours of their departure for some days ; for it was not fitting that they should leave unexpectedly, and as it were by stealth—a mode of departure which they had adopted when they came into Egypt ; but then they had a reason for it, for the life of the Child was in danger. And now they are setting out ; Joseph goes before with the men, and the Blessed Virgin follows at some distance with the matrons. Take, then, in spirit the Child by the hand, and go with Him before His mother, for she will not suffer Him out of her sight. When they had passed the gate, Joseph would no longer permit them to accompany him ; when perhaps one of them who was rich, taking pity on their poverty, called the Child Jesus to him and gave Him something for their journey. The Child, though ashamed, accepted it ; we can imagine Him for the love of poverty holding out His Hand, and bashfully taking the money and returning thanks for it ; and then others begin to give Him something also, the matrons calling Him and doing the same. His mother, too, was no less abashed, yet she also humbly acknowledged the gifts. Do you then compassionate them, for He it is

whose is "the earth and the fulness thereof,"[1] who made choice of so rigorous a poverty and such narrow circumstances, for Himself, His mother, and His foster-father. How brightly does their poverty shine in all its holiness! How does it draw us to the love and practice of it! At last, having returned thanks to the company, they wish them good-bye, and pursue their journey.

But how will the Child Jesus bear the fatigue of this journey, being yet of tender age? It will be a greater trial than the journey when He came into Egypt. For then He was so little that He was easily carried, but now He is too big to be carried, and too little to walk. It may have been that some good neighbours gave or lent an ass for Him to ride on. O beautiful and delicate Youth, King of Heaven and earth, what labours didst Thou undergo for us, even in Thy earliest years! Well hath the prophet said in Thy person, "I am poor, and in labours from my youth."[2] Great indeed are the privations, incessant the toil, and countless the bodily hardships, Thou didst assume for our sakes! Thou seemest to have hated Thyself out of love for us. Surely this one labour, on which we are now meditating, should have sufficed to redeem us. Take up, then, the Boy Jesus, and in spirit put Him on the ass, conduct Him trustily, and when He wants to dismount, receive Him joyfully into your arms, and hold Him a little while, at least till His mother comes up, who may be imagined to walk a little more slowly and evenly. Then the Child will go to her, and the reception of Him will be to her a great repose. On they go, and through the desert by which they came, they pass; during this journey often excite compassion for them, for they have but little rest. See them, how fatigued they are, and worn out with toil both by day and night. When they reached the confines of the desert, there

[1] Ps. xxiv. 1. [2] Ps. lxxxviii. 15. V.

they may have met John the Baptist, who had already begun to lead a penitential life, though said to be free from sin. It is thought that the place on the banks of Jordan where John baptized, is that over which the children of Israel passed, when they came from Egypt through this very desert; and that nigh to that place in this desert John did penance. It is quite possible, if this were the case, that the Boy Jesus, when He passed that way on His return, might find him there. Meditate, then, on the joy which would surely accompany such a meeting, and see them remaining for a while with the Baptist, partaking of his rough food, and, after the sweetness of spiritual refreshment, bidding him adieu. And you, at meeting and parting, show respect for the Saint, in spirit embracing his feet, seeking his blessing, and striving to imitate him; for great is that child and very wonderful, even from his cradle. He was the first hermit, the founder and model of all who choose the Religious Life. He was most pure, a very great preacher, more than a prophet, and a glorious martyr. Then the travellers crossed Jordan, and called at the house of Elizabeth, where there was great joy and mutual congratulations. Then it was that Joseph, on hearing that Archelaus, the son of Herod, reigned in Judæa, was filled with fear; and being warned by an Angel in a dream, withdrew to Galilee, to the city of Nazareth.

Behold, we have brought back the Child Jesus from Egypt, and upon His return, the sisters and other relatives and friends of the Blessed Virgin all ran to visit them. But they remained in Nazareth, and lived a life of poverty. From this time to the twelfth year of His age, nothing is recorded of the Child Jesus. There is a tradition, however, and it is not improbable, that the fountain is still there out of which He used to draw water for His mother. For the lowly Lord, perhaps, did services of this kind for her, for she had no

other to serve her. Here, too, you can imagine that S. John the Evangelist came with his mother, she being the Blessed Virgin's sister, and he being about five years old. For it is reported of him that he died sixty-seven years after our Lord's Passion, in the ninety-eighth year of his age; and, therefore, at the time of Christ's Passion, when our Lord was thirty-three or a little more, S. John was thirty-one. S. John, then, would be about five, when our Lord was seven years old on His return from Egypt. Behold, then, the children standing together and conversing, as our Lord may enable you. For this was that disciple whom afterwards Jesus loved, with the love of friendship.

CHAPTER XIV.

How the Child Jesus remained behind in Jerusalem.

But when He was twelve years old, He went up with His parents to Jerusalem, according to the custom and law of the Feast, which lasted eight days. Then, again the Child Jesus performed an arduous and long journey, to honour His Heavenly Father on the Festivals appointed by Him: for there is supreme love between the Father and the Son. But the affliction and bitter sorrow of heart which He felt on account of the dishonour done to His Father by the manifold offences of sinners, far exceeded the joy which the external honour and pomp paid to His Father during the Festival gave Him. Thus, then, the Lord of the Law observed His own law, and humbly took His place among the rest as one of the poorest of His creatures. And when

the Feast was ended, His parents returned home, but He remained behind in Jerusalem. Here give your best attention, and be present in spirit, for there is much in this narrative for devout and profitable meditation. I have already said that Nazareth, where our Lord dwelt, is about seventy[1] miles from Jerusalem. When, then, His mother and Joseph, having travelled by different roads, came in the evening to the place where they were to put up for the night, the mother seeing Joseph without her Son, in whose company she expected Him to have journeyed, asks him, "Where is the Child?" And he replies, "I know not. Is He not with you? I expected that He had travelled with you." Then the mother, crushed with bitter grief, with tears cried, "He has not returned with me. I see I have not taken care enough of my Child;" and she rushed out, late as it was, with all the composure she could command, and went from house to house making inquiries about Him, and saying, "Have you seen my Son?" "Have you not seen my Son?" hardly knowing, so great was her grief and ardent desire, what she said. And Joseph, also in tears, followed her. And what rest, think you, could they find, when they found not Him—and especially His mother, who loved Him so devotedly? For although her friends sought to console her, she could in no wise be comforted. For what was it to lose Jesus? Behold her and condole with her, for her soul is in bitter anguish, for never since she was born did she experience grief like this. Let us not, then, be disturbed when trouble comes, seeing that the Lord did not spare His own mother. As it is His own to whom especially He permits tribulations to come, and they are the signs of His love, it is good for us to have them.

At length, the Blessed Mother shuts herself up in her closet, and turning to prayer and lamentation, thus addresses

[1] Fourteen or fifteen, in original.

God: "O God, Eternal Father, most merciful and most benign, it has pleased Thee to entrust to me Thy Son, and alas! I have lost Him, and I know not where He is. Restore Him to me, I pray Thee. O Father, remove this bitter sorrow from me, and show me Thy Son! O Father, look upon the affliction of my heart, and not on my negligence; for I acted incautiously, but I did it in ignorance. But of Thy goodness restore Him to me, for I cannot live without Him. O my dearest Son, where art Thou? What has happened to you? With whom now art Thou dwelling? Hast Thou returned to Thy Father in Heaven? I know that Thou art God, that Thou art the Son of God; but how is it that Thou hast not told me of Thy departure? Or rather, perhaps some one has treacherously waylaid Thee? For I know that as true man Thou wert born of me, and that when sought by Herod I carried Thee into Egypt. May Thy Father guard Thee from all evil, my Son! Tell me, my Son, where Thou art, and I will come to Thee, or do Thou come to me. Spare me this once, for it has never happened before, and I will never neglect Thee again. When did I ever offend Thee, my Son? On what account, then, hast Thou left me? I know that Thou knowest the sorrow of my heart. O my Son, do not delay to return to me. Never, since Thou wert born, have I lived, ate, or slept without Thee till now. But now I am deprived of Thee, not knowing how it has come to pass. Thou knowest that Thou art my hope, my life, and all my good, and that without Thee I cannot live. Disclose to me, then, where Thou art, and how I may be enabled to find Thee."

With these, and with similar utterances, did the mother, throughout the night, pour forth the anguish of her soul for her beloved Son. Early the next morning they went forth in pursuit of the Holy Child, through the neighbouring places; for there were many roads from Jerusalem by which

He might return, as often between places there are different routes by which you can travel. They spent the next day in other places, seeking for Him amongst their kinsfolk and acquaintance. And after this, not finding Him, His mother's fears and anxiety became intensified, and beyond the reach of all consolation. But on the third day they returned to Jerusalem, where they found Him in the Temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors. No sooner did she see her Son, than she was over-joyed, and her life seemed to revive in her, and falling upon her knees, with tears she gave thanks to God. You can conceive how the Child Jesus, seeing His mother, came to her; and she, taking Him in her arms, pressed Him to her, and kissed Him tenderly on His cheeks, and holding Him to her bosom, for a while continued to embrace Him, unable through emotion to express what she felt. Afterwards, regarding Him wistfully, she says, "Son, why hast Thou thus dealt with us? Behold, Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing."[1] Then He replied, "How is it that ye sought Me? Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" "And they understood not the saying." Then His mother said to Him, "Son, it is my wish that we should return home; will you not go back with us?" And He said, "I will do as you desire," and He returned with them to Nazareth.

You have contemplated the affliction of the mother on this trying occasion. But how did her Son pass those three days? Turn, then, your attention to Him. Imagine Him as a beggar, knocking at some poor man's door and bashfully asking for a night's lodging. See Him enter the house, and partake of the food which was bestowed upon Him—Jesus poor, amongst the poor. Then behold Him sitting in the midst of the doctors, with calm, wise, and reverent look, listening to them, and asking them questions as if

[1] S. Luke ii. 48, 49.

needing instruction: which He did out of humility, and also lest He should confound them by His wonderful answers.

But here you may consider, in this occurrence, three important truths. First, he who would cleave to God must not be too much in the company of relations, but must sometimes withdraw from them. For the Child Jesus Christ left even His dearest mother, when He was intent on His Father's business; and afterwards, when they sought Him amongst kinsfolk and acquaintance, they found Him not. Secondly, he who would lead a spiritual life ought not to be surprised if sometimes he suffers from dryness of spirit, and feels for a while as though he were forsaken by God, since, to our Lord's mother, this happened. Let him not faint under this affliction, but let him diligently seek God in holy meditations and by perseverance in well-doing, and he will find Him again. Thirdly, no one ought to follow his now inclination and will. For, although the Lord Jesus said that it behoved Him to be about His Father's business, He seemed to change His purpose and follow the will of His mother, accompanying her and His foster-father to Nazareth, where He was subject to them. In this also you can admire His lowliness, of which we shall treat more fully presently.

CHAPTER XV.

What our Lord did from the Twelfth to the Thirtieth Year of His Age.

THE Lord Jesus returned, therefore, from the Temple and from Jerusalem with His parents to the city of Nazareth, and was subject unto them, and dwelt with them from that date to the beginning of His thirtieth year. Nor is there anything in Holy Scripture recorded of His doings during the whole of that time, which is in itself very wonderful. What, then, shall call out our admiration in Him, or what shall we conceive that He did during that period? Did the Lord Jesus remain idle for so long a time, so that nothing was done worthy of record in Scripture? But if He performed actions, why are they not related as His other deeds are? It seems very remarkable. But particularly notice this, that His doing nothing wonderful was itself a wonder. For nothing which concerns His life is devoid of mystery; and, as there was virtue in His actions, so was there in His silence, in His inaction, and in His retirement. Thus this Sovereign Master, who was about to teach all virtues and the path of life, began from His youth to practise virtues, but in a wondrous, hidden, and till then unheard-of way; namely, by making Himself appear in the eyes of men, useless, contemptible, and simple, as we may devoutly conceive, without any risk of presumption. But in these meditations I do not wish to affirm anything which may not be proved by the authority of Holy Scripture, or of the Doctors of the Church, as I said in the beginning.

Christ, then, withdrew Himself from the companionship and conversation of men. He went, we may be sure, to the synagogue, which was then the Church. He stayed a long time there in prayer, having taken the lowest place. Then He would return home and remain with His mother, and sometimes help His foster-father. He would pass through the crowd, going and returning, as if He did not see any one. All marvelled that so fair a youth should achieve nothing worthy of renown. For they expected that He would do great deeds, and become a noted man. For, while a boy, "He increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man."[1] But as He grew up, and reached from His twelfth to His thirtieth year, He nevertheless did no work worthy of renown, or which bore the appearance of manly worth, and therefore, being greatly disappointed, they might have laughed at Him, saying, "He is an useless fellow; He is an idiot, nothing of a man, a fool, a stupid creature." Neither did He give Himself to any learning, so that it is said to have been a proverbial remark that He was, though grown, still a child. And He persisted so long in this way of living, and so clung to it, that He was commonly regarded by all as a person of no account, and beneath their notice; which the prophet had well declared long before in his person, "I am a worm, and no man,"[2] etc.

You see, then, what Christ did, in doing nothing. He rendered Himself mean and contemptible to all, as I have said. But does this appear of small moment to you? Such a line of conduct was not necessary to Him, but it is to me. Certainly, in all which we do I know nothing which presents greater difficulties. He seems to me to have reached the very highest state, who has advanced so far as to have overcome and brought into subjection his own mind and the proud arrogance of his flesh, choosing not to be considered

[1] S. Luke ii. 52. [2] Ps. xxii. 6.

of any account, but rather to be despised as one insignificant and vile. Greater is this, according to Solomon, than the conquest of cities. "The patient man is better than the mighty, and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city."[1] Until you reach this point, do not think that you have done anything. For, seeing that we are truly unprofitable servants, even when we have done all, according to the words of our Lord; till we attain to this degree of abjection, we do not abide in truth, but in vanity, and walk therein. This also the Apostle plainly declares when he says, "If any man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself."[2] If, then, you inquire why the Lord Jesus acted thus, I answer you, that it was not necessary for His own sake, but for our instruction. Therefore, if we do not learn to do the same, we are inexcusable. Abominable indeed is it if the worm, and he who is soon to be the food of worms, exalt himself; when the Lord of Majesty, humbling Himself, descended so low.

But if any one should deem it incredulous that our Lord should have lived so long uselessly, and be rather disposed to attribute deficiency to the narrative of the Evangelists, it can be replied that, to offer practically an example of such great virtue was, far from being useless, a most useful expenditure of time, and the true and stable foundation of all virtues. And from our Lord Himself we have the words recorded, in the Gospel of S. John, "When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me; and ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with Me from the beginning"[3] (that is, as preachers). And Peter, at the election of S. Matthias the Apostle, says, "Of these men, which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among

[1] Prov. xvi. 32. [2] Gal. vi. 3. [3] S. John xv. 26.

us, beginning from the baptism of John,"[1] etc. But then Jesus "began to be about thirty years of age."[2] If the Lord Jesus had begun to preach before him, John would not have been His forerunner. And, moreover, if He commenced His ministry sooner, how came it to pass that He was not known to His neighbours after so many years, so that they asked, "Is not this the carpenter's Son?"[3] whilst, after He had but a short time come forth, He was called, even by His companions, the Son of David? If, then, He had commenced His ministry sooner, or had done any remarkable actions, they would have been recorded, or at least some of them, nor would all the Evangelists be wholly silent about them. This also accords with the opinion of S. Bernard, as you will see in the following chapter, and has the support of his authority. But whatever may be the truth on this subject, I cannot but think it affords matter for devout meditation. Thus did the Lord Jesus form the sword of lowliness, by this manner of life, as by the prophet it was said to Him, "Gird Thee with Thy sword upon Thy thigh, O Thou most mighty."[4] With no more fitting sword, forsooth, than that of lowliness, did it become Him to slay the proud adversary. For we do not read that He ever employed the sword of His greatness, but rather the contrary one, even at a time when it was most needed—the time of His Passion. The same prophet complains to God the Father in behalf of His Son, saying, "Thou hast taken away the edge of His sword; and givest Him not victory in the battle."[5] You observe, then, how the Lord Jesus "began first to do, then to teach;" for He was soon to say, "Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart."[6] It was this which He first would practise, and that unfeignedly, doing it from the heart, for He was truly

[1] Acts i. 21. [2] S. Luke iii. 23. [3] S. Matt. xiii. 55.
[4] Ps. xlv. 4. [5] Ps. lxxxix. 42. [6] S. Matt. xi. 29.

and from the heart lowly and meek. There could be no dissimulation in Him; but He rather abased Himself more and more deeply in lowliness, vileness, and abjection; yea, made Himself of no account in the sight of all men, so that even after that He began to preach and to reveal high and divine truths, and also to do actual miracles and mighty works, they still held Him in no reputation, but vilified and derided Him, saying, "Who is this? Is not this the carpenter's Son?"[1] and used similar derisive and reproachful expressions. In this sense were indeed verified the words of the Apostle, when he said of our Lord, "He emptied Himself, and took upon Him the form of a servant;"[2] and not only of a servant, by His Incarnation, but of a seemingly unprofitable servant by His lowly and abject mode of life.

If, then, you would see how most mightily He girded this sword to Himself, consider His every action, and you will ever find His lowliness shining forth in all He did. You have seen it already; recall, then, what has been said, and impress it on your memory. We have also, in the different stages of Christ's Life, manifold expressions of this grace, to which He was ever faithful and which He continually manifested, even to the hour of His death, and even after death, nay, even after His Ascension. Did He not wash the disciples' feet at last? Did He not humble Himself to a point beyond which it is impossible to go, even to the bearing of the Cross? Did He not, after He had entered upon the glory of the Resurrection, call His disciples "brethren"? "Go," said He to the Magdalene, "and tell my brethren, I ascend to my Father," etc.[3] Did He not, even after His Ascension, speak humbly to Paul, as if to an equal? "Saul, Saul, why persecutest Thou me?"[4] And did He not, seated on the Throne of His Majesty, represent Himself as about to say, "Inasmuch as ye have

[1] S. Matt. xiii. 55. [2] Phil. ii. 7. [3] S. John xx. 17. [4] Acts ix. 4.

done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me?"[1]

Not without cause did our Saviour love this virtue so greatly. He knew that, as pride is the root of all sin, so humility is the foundation of all virtue and of salvation. Without this foundation all building is in vain. Do not, therefore, put trust in virginity or poverty, or in any virtue or work, unless lowliness accompany it. Christ, then, made this virtue, and showed how it was to be acquired; namely, by making Himself to be of no account, and by casting Himself down in His own sight and in the eyes of others, and by the continual performance of lowly actions. Go, then, and do thou likewise, if you wish to obtain lowliness. For humility must take the lead amongst the virtues; that is, contempt of self, and the practice of menial and lowly works. On this S. Bernard says, "Humility, which results from humiliation, is the foundation of the whole spiritual fabric. Humiliation is as much the way to humility as patience is to peace, or reading to knowledge. If you desire the virtue of lowliness, you must not shun the path of humiliation. For if you cannot bear to be humiliated, you will never advance in lowliness."[2] And again he says, "You must think humbly of yourself, if you are striving for a higher state; lest, when raised above your place, you fall beneath it, because you were not firmly established in a true and solid lowliness. And because, except through the path of lowliness, there is no way of attaining to real greatness; therefore, he who would ascend, must be humiliated by reproof, that he may be exalted by lowliness."[3] Therefore, when you see yourself humbled, take it as a good sign, and as a sure token that grace is at hand. For as the heart is lifted up before destruction,[4] so before exaltation there is

[1] S. Matt. xxv. 40.
[2] S. Bernard, Epist. lxxxvii.
[3] Id. Serm. xxxiv. in Cant.
[4] Prov. xvi. 18.

lowliness. Truly you have read both that God plainly "resists the proud, and gives grace to the lowly."[1] And a little further on he says, "But it is little to be willing to submit to humiliations which come directly from God, unless we learn to do the same when He sends humiliations through the instrumentality of others. Take a wonderful instance of this in the case of holy David, who, when cursed by a servant, did not allow a movement of anger at so great an injury, because a prior movement of grace animated him. 'What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah?'[2] he exclaimed. O truly a man after God's own heart, who felt more indignant against one who avenges himself, than incensed against one who upbraided him! Wherefore he can say with a secure conscience, 'If I have rendered evil in return for evil,'" etc.[3] For the present what has been said about humility will suffice.

Let us return to the consideration of the actions and life of the Lord Jesus our Mirror, as the principal object of our inquiry. And again imagine yourself to be an eye-witness of all that takes place, as I have before exhorted you. Behold that Family, blessed above all others, small in itself, but great in dignity, living in a poor and humble manner. It was Joseph's delight, as far as age permitted him, to gain what he could at the carpenter's board. The Blessed Virgin laboured at her needle and distaff. She likewise attended to the duties of the house, which, as you know well, are not slight; she prepared food for her husband and for her Son, and went through the round of domestic labours, doubtless unassisted by any menial. Pity her, then, because she has to labour thus with her hands; pity, also, the Lord Jesus, for He helped her, sharing her labours as far as He could. For He came, as He Himself said, "not to be ministered to, but to minister."[4] See Him, then, assisting His Blessed

[1] S. James iv. 6.
[2] 2 Sam. xvi. 10.
[3] Ps. vii. 4. Serm. xxxiv. in Cant.
[4] S. Matt. xx. 28.

mother, arranging the frugal repast, making the bed for the night's rest, busied with household work. Behold also the three—Himself, His mother, and Joseph—taking their meals together day by day; no dainties or luxuries, but poor and homely fare is to be seen upon the board. Regard also their communications; no vain and idle word is spoken, but their conversation is full of wisdom, and sanctified by the Holy Ghost, and their mind no less than their body is refreshed. Then, after a little recreation, all retire to prayer, in their separate rooms; for their house would not be spacious, but a little one. Follow them in spirit into their different chambers, and behold the Lord Jesus, after His evening prayer, composing Himself, night after night, it may be, to sleep on the floor, the few hours of the night which remained, so humbly and in such a poor condition, and as one of the lowest of His creatures. Thus ought you, when you are going to bed, nightly to think of Him in this state. O hidden God! why do you thus afflict your innocent and sinless body? To spend the night but once in such a way, ought to suffice to redeem the whole world. Boundless love constrained you to do this; it was because Thou wert very zealous for the lost sheep,[1] eager to bear it upon Thy Shoulders to heavenly pastures. Why shouldst thou, O King of kings, Eternal God, Who suppliedst the needs of all, Who givedst all things abundantly to all, be brought to such a condition as this? Hast Thou reserved for Thyself this extreme poverty, degradation, and hardship, endured for so long a time, amid watching, sleeping, fasting, eating, and all Thy other actions? Where, then, are those who seek bodily ease, and love curious and useless ornaments? Those who act thus have not been trained in Thy school. Are we, then, wiser than the Master? He taught us by word and example, lowliness, poverty, mortification of the body,

[1] S. Luke xv.

and a life of toil. Let us, then, follow the Sovereign Master, who neither wills to deceive nor can be deceived. "Having," in the words of the Apostle, "food and raiment, let us be therewith content,"[1] seeking in those things what is rightly sufficient, and not superfluities. Continue also in the exercise of other virtues, and "give thyself" to spiritual study, and be most careful to persevere in what you begin.

CHAPTER XVI.

Concerning the Baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ.

IMAGINE the Lord Jesus, having completed His twenty-ninth year, having lived in this abject and painful manner all the time, saying to His mother, "The time is come that I should glorify and manifest My Father, and show Myself to the world, and labour for the salvation of souls, for which the Father sent Me forth. Be of good courage, therefore, good mother, for I shall quickly return to you;" and the Master of lowliness, kneeling down, prayed for a blessing on His departure. And she likewise knelt down, and embracing Him with tears, said most tenderly, "My Blessed Son, go, with a Divine blessing, from your home; be mindful of me, and remember that you soon return to me." Thus, then, did Jesus, having reverently taken leave of His parents, His mother and foster-father Joseph, set out from Nazareth toward Jerusalem, by the way which led to Jordan, where John was baptizing, at a place which was a considerable distance from Jerusalem. And the Lord of all the earth

[1] 1 Tim. vi. 8.

performed the journey alone, for as yet He had no disciples. Gaze upon Him, remembering the Divine Presence; see the solitary wayfarer, barefooted, travel-worn, fatigued by so long a journey, and pity Him from your heart. O Lord, whither goest Thou? Art Thou not, indeed, higher than all the kings of the earth? O Lord, where, then, are your attendants? where are the barons, the counts, the captains, the warriors, the horses, the elephants, the camels, the equipages, the couriers, and all the rest, which should form Thy train? Where is Thy suite, and where are the guards who keep off the populace from approaching too near Thy Sacred Presence, as earthly monarchs are wont to have, and other great personages? Where are the sounds of trumpets, the strains of music, the royal banners? Where are the forerunners, whose business it is to prepare for the fitting reception and entertainment of princes? Where are all the pomps and honours, which surround us, worms of earth, on such occasions? O Lord, are not the heavens and the earth full of Thy glory; how is it, then, that Thou art become thus inglorious? Art not Thou He to whom "thousand thousands ministered" in Thy kingdom,[1] "and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before" Thee? Why, then, dost Thou thus journey unattended, and barefooted? Ah, yes! I divine the cause: Thou art not now in Thy kingdom; for Thy kingdom is not in this world. Thou hast emptied Thyself,[2] taking the form of a servant, not of a king. Thou art made as one of us, "a stranger and sojourner, as all our fathers were."[3] Thou art become a servant, that we may become kings. For Thou hast come to conduct us to Thine own kingdom, by laying bare before our eyes the way by which we can ascend thither. Why, then, do we neglect it? Why do we not follow Thee? Why do we not humble ourselves? Wherefore do we pant after and grasp at pomps and

[1] Dan. vii. 10. [2] Phil. ii. 7. [3] Ps. xxxix. 12.

honours, vain and transient? Certainly because our kingdom is of this world; nor do we at all regard ourselves as pilgrims here, and therefore we incur all these evils. O vain children of men, why do we prefer the shadow to the substance, the perishing to the solid and lasting, the temporal to the eternal, and eagerly run after it? Surely, O good Lord, if we did but realize the truth, that we are strangers and pilgrims, we should quickly follow Thee, taking of these visible possessions only what is necessary, lest we should be retarded in running after the odour of Thy ointments.[1] For we should be free from every burden, and should, regarding these transitory things as already past, easily despise them. The Lord Jesus, then, thus humbly travels day after day, till He arrives at Jordan. And when He had come thither, He found John there baptizing sinners, and a great crowd of people who had gathered round him to hear his preaching; for they believed him to be the Christ. Then the Lord Jesus said to him, "I ask thee to baptize Me with these." But John beholding Him, and in spirit recognizing Him, was afraid, and with reverence answered, "Lord, I have need to be baptized of Thee."[2] To whom the Lord Jesus replied, "Suffer it to be so now; for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." Do not reveal this now, nor make Me known, for My time is not yet come; but baptize Me. Now is the time of lowliness, and therefore will I fulfil all lowliness.

Attend also to lowliness yourself, for this is a fitting place to treat of it, and you ought to know, according to the commentary on this passage, that lowliness has three degrees. The first is, to subject ourselves to those who are above us, and not to prefer ourselves to our equals. The second is, to subject ourselves to our equals, and not to prefer ourselves to our inferiors. The third and highest is,

[1] Cant. i. 3. [2] S. Matt. iii. 14, 15.

to subject ourselves to inferiors, and this is the degree Christ practised on this occasion, and therefore He fulfilled all lowliness.

You see how Christ increased in the exercise of humility. For in the lowliness which we are here considering, He subjected Himself to His own servant, made Himself of no account, and justified and magnified His servant. Now in comparison of that which has gone before, see how His lowliness has advanced. For hitherto, He has conversed humbly with men, as a useless and mean person, but now He would appear also as a sinner. For John preached to sinners the baptism of repentance, and baptized them; and the Lord Jesus, amongst them, and before them all, willed to be baptized. Thus S. Bernard speaks on this matter: "He came amongst the rabble to the baptism of John. He came as one of the people—He Who was alone without sin! Who would ever think that He was the Son of God? Who would ever believe Him to be the Lord of Majesty? Indeed Thou hast greatly humbled Thyself, O Lord; too much dost Thou hide Thyself, yet Thou canst not hide Thyself from John."[1] And the same may be said of His Circumcision, for there also He willed to appear as a sinner; but here the lowliness is greater, for that was in private, this in public. But was there not a risk in all this, lest, when He was greatly desirous to go forth and preach, He should be spurned as a sinner Himself? Yet, notwithstanding this, He would not give up lowliness, but as the Master of that virtue He would most profoundly abase Himself. He willed even to wear the appearance of what He was not, for the sake of the abjection and contempt which would be thereby brought upon Him, having always in view our instruction: we will, on the contrary, to appear what we are not, for our own praise and glorification. If there is any

[1] S. Bernard, Serm. 1 in Epiph.

scrap of goodness, we love to make a display of it; but our defects we conceal, though we are ever so sinful and wicked. Is this our way of being lowly? Hear upon this not me, but S. Bernard, who says, "There is a lowliness which charity quickens and inflames; and there is a lowliness which truth produces in us, yet which has no heat. The one indeed consists in knowledge, the other in affection. For if you examine yourself by the light of truth, and look steadily and truthfully into yourself, and judge, unbiassed by flattery, I doubt not but that you will be humbled, and will become more vile in your own eyes, from a knowledge of the truth about yourself; although you may not yet, perhaps, bear to be so regarded by others. By this you will be humbled indeed by the force of truth, but not at all as yet by the infusion of charity. For were you as much affected by the love of that truth which so transparently and truthfully showed you to yourself, as you were illuminated by its rays, you would without doubt desire that all should form the same opinion of you, which you know is held by the truth within yourself. I say, however, as far as is expedient, for it is not at all times advisable to make everything known to every one which you know about yourself; for by the charity itself of truth, and by the truth of charity, we are forbidden to make known what may hurt another. But leaving such a case out of the question, if influenced only by personal considerations, you keep pent up within yourself the judgment of truth, what doubt can there be that you love the truth less than you love yourself, since you prefer to it your own interest or honour?" And further he adds "If you are already humbled by that necessary humility, which the truth which searcheth the hearts and veins instils into the senses of the watchful soul, exercise the will, and make a virtue of a necessity, for there is no virtue where there is no consent of the will. If, then, you are unwilling

to appear outwardly otherwise than you find yourself inwardly, the will has acted. If not, fear lest it may be said of you, 'He flattereth himself in his own sight until his abominable sin be found out.'[1] 'Divers weights and divers measures, both of them are alike abomination to the Lord.'[2] What then? Is it that you depreciate yourself when you secretly weigh yourself with the scales of truth, and valuing yourself more highly outwardly, you then sell yourself to us at a higher price than truth itself prescribed. Fear God, and shrink from so base an action, as to extol yourself with the will, at the very time when truth in the understanding abases you. For this is to resist the truth, this is to fight against God. But do you rather agree with God, and submit your will to the truth, not only submit to the truth but love it. 'Shall not,' says the Psalmist, 'my soul be subject to God?'[3] But it is a slight thing to be subject to God, unless you are also subject to all mankind for God's sake, both to those who bear rule, and to those who are set over you by them. I say more, be subject to equals, be subject also to inferiors, 'for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.'[4] Go also to your inferior if you would be perfect in righteousness, defer to him, stoop humbly to those less than yourself."[5] Thus S. Bernard teaches. He says also, "Who is righteous but the humble? For then, when the Lord stooped to the hands of His servant, the Baptist who trembled because of His Majesty, He said, 'Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness,'[6] thus identifying the summit of perfect righteousness with the perfection of lowliness. Therefore the just man is the humble." Thus far S. Bernard.[7] But this righteousness in the humble appears in this: that he

[1] Ps. xxxvi. 2. [2] Prov. xx. 10. [3] Ps. lxii. 1. V.
[4] S. Matt. iii. 15. [5] Serm. 47 in Cant. [6] S. Matt. iii. 15.
[7] Serm. 47 in Cant.

renders to every one his due; he does not take that which is another's, but he gives the honour to God, and retains the vileness for himself. You will understand this more clearly, if you consider the injustice of the proud, who attributes to himself the gifts of the Lord. Of him S. Bernard thus speaks: "As evils are wont to arise from great goods, when we, exalted by the possession of them, use them as if they were not given to us, and give not the glory to God; so we who seemed to be greatest on account of the grace which we had received, through our want of a right acknowledgment of those gifts, are accounted least before God. But I spare you. I have used the milder terms, 'greatest' and 'least,' but I felt the words to be inadequate. I veiled the real truth; I will now lay it bare. I should have said 'very good' and 'very wicked.' For truly and undoubtedly, any one is so much the more wicked, in proportion as he has advanced and attributes that advancement to himself. For this is the worst offence. But if any one should say, 'Be this far from you, I admit that by the grace of God I am what I am,'[1] yet still eagerly desires glory from the grace which he has received, is he not a thief and a robber? Let such a one hear the words, 'Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant.'[2] What can be more wicked than for a servant to usurp to himself the glory of his Lord?"[3] Hitherto S. Bernard. You see, then, how the perfection of righteousness consists in lowliness, and neither robs God of His honour, nor ascribes to itself what it ought not. And certainly it is not hurtful to our neighbour. For the humble does not judge his neighbour, nor prefer himself to him, but esteems himself less than all, and chooses for himself the lowest place. Concerning whom S. Bernard again thus

[1] 1 Cor. xiv. 10. [2] S. Luke xix. 22.

[3] Serm. 84 in Cant.

speaks: "How knowest thou, O man, but that the one whom perhaps thou countest to be the most vile and miserable of all, whose life thou abhorrest as most sinful and notoriously foul, and therefore thinkest that he ought to be spurned, not only when compared with thyself, who art perhaps confident that thou livest soberly, justly, and piously, but also when compared with all other wicked men, as the most abandoned of all; how knowest thou, I say, but that he shall become, by the change of the right hand of the Most High, better than both thee and them, nay, perhaps is so already in the sight of God? God therefore wills us to choose not the middle place, nor even the place last but one, not even one of the lowest places; but 'go,' saith He, 'and sit down in the lowest room,'[1] that you may sit alone, the very last of all, and not presume, I do not say, to prefer yourself, but even to compare yourself to any one."[2] Thus far S. Bernard.

In many places the same S. Bernard commends this virtue of humility. He says, "A great mother and lofty virtue is humility, which earns for us that which teaching cannot give; is worthy to obtain what cannot be obtained by learning; is worthy to conceive from the Word and by the Word, that which it cannot itself explain in its own words. Why is this? Not because of merit; but because it seemed good in the sight of the Father of the Word, the Spouse of the soul, Jesus Christ our Lord, who is over all God, blessed for ever."[3] So again, "Humility is the virtue through which, with the truest knowledge of himself, any one counts himself vile."[4] Elsewhere he says, "Humility is the only virtue which makes reparation to wounded love."[5] Again he says, "Humility alone is not wont to boast, has no mind to presume, and has no habit of con-

[1] S. Luke xiv. 10. [2] Serm. 37 in Cant. [3] Serm. 85 in Cant.
[4] De Grad. Humil. [5] Serm. 2 in Nat. Dom.

tention. He who is truly humble does not contend in judgment, nor pretend to be righteous."[1] Humility, forsooth, reconciles us to God, and renders us pleasing in His sight. Again S. Bernard says, "The virtue of humility is ever intimately associated with Divine Grace."[2] Indeed, in order to preserve lowliness, Divine piety is accustomed to ordain, that the more any one advances, the less does he think himself to have advanced. For even to the highest degree of the spiritual life, whatever advance any one may have made, something of the imperfection of the lowest stage will remain, so that it will seem to him that he has not even reached that.

Again S. Bernard says, "Lovely is the combination of virginity and lowliness, and no slight delight to God is that soul in which humility commends virginity, and virginity adorns humility. How greatly, then, ought she to be reverenced, in whom fecundity exalts humility, and child-bearing consecrates virginity. You hear that she is a virgin, you hear that she is humble. If you cannot copy the virginity of the humble, copy the humility of the virgin. Praiseworthy is the virtue of virginity; but humility is the more necessary. The former is of counsel, the latter of precept. To the one you are invited, to the other you are obliged. Of the former it is said, 'He that is able to receive it, let him receive it;'[3] of the latter, 'Except ye become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven.'[4] The one, then, is remunerated; the other is exacted. You can, in short, be saved without virginity; you cannot without humility. Humility, I say, can please, which deplores the loss of virginity. Without humility, I dare to say, not even the virginity of Mary would have been pleasing. Upon whom, saith He, shall My Spirit rest, except upon the humble and

[1] De Episc.
[2] Serm. 4, super Missus est.
[3] S. Matt. xix. 12.
[4] S. Matt. xviii. 3.

peaceful?[1] If Mary, then, had not been humble, the Holy Spirit would not have rested upon her. If upon her He had not rested, she would not have conceived. For how without Him, could she have conceived by Him? It is manifest, therefore, that in order that she might conceive of the Holy Ghost, as she asserts, the Lord had 'regarded the lowliness of His handmaiden,'[2] rather than her virginity. Whence it follows, that her humility without doubt was the means of rendering her virginity pleasing to God. What dost thou say, proud virgin? Mary ignores her virginity, and glories in her lowliness; and you, forgetful of lowliness, flatter yourself upon your virginity. He 'regarded,' saith she, 'the lowliness of His handmaiden.' But who was she? A virgin holy, a virgin sober, a virgin devout. Art thou more chaste than she? Art thou more devout? Or is thy modesty more acceptable than Mary's chastity? Is it, indeed, so great that it will suffice without lowliness, without which hers could not do? In short, the more honourable thou art from this singular gift of chastity, so much the greater injury dost thou inflict on thyself, when thou dost sully the fairness of thy life by the admission of pride."[3] Again, "Charity, chastity, and lowliness are of no colour, but not of no beauty; rather their beauty must be rare, as they possess the power of delighting the Divine gaze. What is more lovely than chastity, which makes a clean thing out of one unclean from his birth, a friend out of an enemy, an angel, in short, out of a man? An angel and a man differ, indeed, from each other but in felicity, not in virtue. And if the chastity of the one is more blissful, that of the latter is more the sign of strength. It is chastity alone which, in this place and time of mortality, represents in a sort of way the state of immortality and glory. Chastity alone, amid the nuptial

[1] Is. lxvi. 2. [2] S. Luke i. 48.
[3] Serm. 1, super Missus est.

ceremonies of this lower world, claims for itself the character of that blessed land, in which they neither marry nor are given in marriage, affording already in some sense a foretaste of that heavenly conversation. Frail, in the meanwhile, is the vessel which we bear about with us, in which often we are in danger; yet chastity holds it in a state of sanctification, like the sweet balsam, which preserves the embalmed bodies from corruption. It controls the senses and restrains the members of the body, lest ease dissolve, or desires contaminate, or pleasures of the flesh render them putrescent." And then again, "Whatever be the surpassing loveliness with which chastity appears adorned, yet without charity it has neither value nor merit. Nor is this wonderful. For what good can we have without charity? Faith? No, not if it should remove mountains. Knowledge? No, not if it should speak with the tongues of angels. Martyrdom? No, not if, he says, I should give my body to be burned. Neither without it is any good accepted, nor with it is the least good rejected. Chastity without charity is a lamp without oil. Take away the oil, and the light will not shine. Take away charity, chastity will no longer please." And further on, in the middle of the letter, "Now, of the three which we proposed, humility alone shall be handled, which is so necessary to the two aforesaid virtues, that without it they do not even seem to be virtues. That chastity or charity may be obtained, humility must render the soul worthy of them. For 'God giveth grace to the lowly.'[1] Humility also preserves the virtues which have been gained; for the Spirit will not rest except on the peaceful and humble.[2] Humility also perfects the virtues; for virtue is made perfect in weakness—that is, in humility. It overcomes that enemy of every grace and source of all sin, pride; and propels from itself and from every other

[1] S. James iv. 6. [2] Is. lxvi. 2.

virtue its arrogant tyranny. For it is rather from other goods that pride increases its strength. But humility alone of all virtues, as a sort of fortress and tower, makes a strong resistance to its malice, and opposes presumption." Thus far S. Bernard. You find, then, many beautiful remarks concerning humility in the writings of S. Bernard, who was himself most truthful and most humble. See, also, what he says of other virtues, that you may know their nature and practise them. But now let us return to the Baptism of our Lord. As soon as John discovered the will of the Lord, he yielded, and baptized Him.

Now, therefore, consider Him attentively. For the Lord of Majesty unclothes Himself, like any ordinary mortal, and is immersed in the cold water, at a very inclement season; for love of us, He works our salvation, instituting the Sacrament of Baptism, and washing away the guilt of our sins. Thus He espoused to Himself the Church as a whole, and each individual soul. For in Baptism, when we profess our faith, we are truly espoused to the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Prophet says, in His person, "I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness."[1] Whence this is a very solemn act, and a mystery of great service and benefit to man. And therefore the Church sings, "To-day is the Church joined to her heavenly Bridegroom, for in Jordan Christ hath washed away her sins."[2] And in this most illustrious week, the whole Trinity in a singular manner manifested itself, "for the Spirit of God descended like a dove, and lighted upon Him; and the voice of the Father resounded, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."[3] But in this place S. Bernard says, "'Hear ye Him,'[4] He saith; behold, O Lord Jesus, begin then now to speak; you have permission from your Father. How long,

[1] Hos. ii. 20. [2] Ant. for Benedictus, Epiphany.
[3] S. Matt. iii. 16, 17; S. Mark i. [4] S. Matt. xvii. 5.

O Power of God and Wisdom of God, as one weak and senseless, wilt Thou remain hidden among the people? How long, O noble King and King of Heaven, wilt Thou suffer Thyself, the carpenter's Son, to be so reputed? For according to the testimony of the Evangelist S. Luke,[1] Thou wert still supposed to be the son of Joseph. O humility of Christ, how dost Thou confound the pride of my vanity! My knowledge is most trifling, yet I flatter myself that I know much, and cannot keep my tongue still. For without modesty and discretion, I push myself forward boastfully, ever ready to speak, swift to teach, slow to hear. And Christ all this time was silent, and hid Himself; and why? Had he to fear vainglory? No. How could He fear vainglory, who is the true glory of the Father? He did, however, indeed fear it, but not for Himself. He feared it for us, knowing how much ground there was to make us afraid. For us He took precautions, and us He thus taught; He was silent with His mouth, but He instructed by His actions; what He afterwards taught in words, He first proclaimed by His example, 'Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart.'[2] For about the infancy of our Lord I hear but little, but from that time to this His thirtieth year I find nothing. But now no longer can He lie hid, because He is so openly manifested by His Father."[3] Thus far S. Bernard. It was his authority which I adduced in a former chapter, from which you learn how the Lord Jesus remained humbly silent for our instruction. You see, then, how everywhere you scent the fragrance of His humility. Of it I am ever drawn to speak, for it is a magnificent virtue, and we need it much; and it is so much the more earnestly to be sought, and affectionately loved, as our Lord in all His actions so signally gave Himself to the practice of it.

[1] S. Luke iii. 23. [2] S. Matt. xi. 29. [3] Serm. 1 in Epiph.

CHAPTER XVII.

Of the Fast and Temptations of Christ. Also of His Return to His Mother. Of Four Means of obtaining Purity of Heart. Of Prayer and its Many Fruits. Of resisting Gluttony. Why and for whom God worked Miracles.

After the Lord Jesus was baptized, He went immediately into the desert to a certain mountain, named "Quarantania," about four miles distant, and there fasted forty days[1] and forty nights, and, according to S. Mark, "was there with the wild beasts."[2] Here, then, attentively consider and behold Him; for He affords you the pattern of many virtues. He goes forth alone; He fasts, prays, and watches; He lies and sleeps on the bare ground, and lives amongst the brute beasts. Pity Him, then; for here, even more than at other times, His life is full of pain and bodily affliction; and from His example learn to exercise the self-same discipline. For here four things are enumerated, which pertain to the exercises of the spiritual life, and wonderfully help each other; namely, solitude, fasting, prayer, and bodily mortification. And it is by means of these principally, that we are able to attain to purity of heart, which purity is to be so greatly longed for, inasmuch as it in a certain way comprises all virtues. For it includes charity, humility, patience, and the other virtues, and withdrawal of all vices; for in company with vices or with defect of a virtue, purity of heart cannot continue. And therefore, in the Conferences of the holy Fathers, we are taught that the whole object of

[1] S. Matt. iv. 1–11; S. Luke iv. 1–13. [2] S. Mark i. 13.

a religious person ought to be the attainment of purity of heart, for it is that by which man obtains the sight of God, as the Lord says in the Gospel, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."[1] And according to S. Bernard, the clearer a man is, the nearer he is to God. To be clear from every stain is to have attained. But in order to reach this state, frequent and constant prayer is of great importance, concerning which you shall be more fully taught hereafter. But prayer, accompanied with intemperance and gluttony, or with ease and idleness, is not of much avail. And then, fasting and bodily mortification are necessary, but with discretion, for the lack of discretion will mar every good action. But besides these, and to turn all these to account, there must be retirement; for in the midst of noise and tumult, it seems hardly possible for prayer to be performed aright; and many things cannot be seen and heard without danger to purity of heart. For death enters through our windows into our souls,[2] and therefore our Lord has taught us by His example, that we should go into solitude, that is, as much as possible, withdraw ourselves from the companionship of others, and be alone, if we wish to be united to Him, and through purity of heart see Him. Shun also gossiping, and especially with worldly persons. Do not seek to form new attachments and friendships, and do not fill your eyes and ears with that which is vain and unreal. And all those things which disturb the quiet of the soul and the repose of the mind, avoid as so much soul-destroying poison. For it was not without cause that the holy Fathers sought out woods and most retired spots, far from the haunts of men, for their dwelling-places. It was not without cause that they recommended those who remained in religious communities to be blind, and deaf, and dumb. But that you may understand

[1] S. Matt. v. 8.

[2] Jer. ix. 21.

this the better, hear what S. Bernard says upon it: "Do you, I say, if you are moved to follow the attractions of the Holy Ghost, and if you begin to burn with the desire of making your soul fit to become the spouse of God, according to the words of the prophet, 'sit alone,'[1] for you have raised yourself above yourself, wishing to be espoused to the Lord of angels. Are you not, indeed, above yourself, if you cleave to God, and are one spirit with Him? Sit, therefore, solitary like the turtle, have nothing to do with the crowd, nor with the multitude, forget also thy own people and thy father's house, and the Lord shall desire thy beauty.[2] O holy soul, be alone, that thou mightest serve Him alone, Whom out of all thou hast chosen for thyself. Shun the public gaze, avoid also sometimes thine own household, withdraw also from thy friends and intimate companions, even those nearest to you. Do you not know that your Spouse is bashful, and that He will not vouchsafe His presence, when you are in the company of others? Withdraw, then, but in mind, not in body; withdraw, then, that is, as far as intention is concerned, with devotion, and in spirit. For Christ the Lord is present with you in spirit, and spirit requires not solitude of body. Nevertheless, it is not without profit sometimes to withdraw yourself in body also, when opportunity offers, especially in time of prayer." And again: "You are alone, if your thoughts are set on the one thing needful, if you are not affected by what is passing around you, if you despise what the multitude prizes, if you have a distaste for what the multitude relishes, if you avoid strife, if you are insensible to injuries, and retain no remembrance of affronts; otherwise, though you may be quite alone outwardly, you are not really alone. Do you see, that you may find solitude in the midst of a crowd, and yet not find it when you are by yourself alone? You are alone,

[1] Lam. iii. 28. [2] Ps. xlv. 10.

however great the number of persons may be with whom you converse, if you only avoid inquisitiveness, or passing a censorious judgment on what is said."[1] Thus far S. Bernard. You observe, then, how necessary a thing is solitude, and how retirement of body is of no avail without solitude of spirit; and further, that bodily retirement is most effective in producing mental solitude, for it prevents the mind from going forth to external things, and enables it to hold undistracted communion with its Spouse. Therefore endeavour with your whole heart, as far as in you lies, to imitate your Lord and Spouse, Jesus Christ, in withdrawal from the world, in prayer, in fasting, and in discreet mortification of the body.

Moreover, from His remaining among the wild beasts, learn to live humbly amongst others, and to bear patiently with those who seem sometimes to behave themselves unreasonably. Often pay your Lord a visit during this time of His solitude. Behold Him, how He converses there, and especially how He lies upon the ground night after night. For every faithful soul ought to visit Him in spirit at least once every day, mostly from Epiphany to the end of the forty days' sojourn in the desert. Now, when the forty days were completed, the Lord hungered. Then the Tempter came to Him, wishing to put Him to the trial, whether He were the Son of God or not; and he tempted Him with gluttony, saying, "If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread."[2] But he could not deceive the Master, for He replied in such a manner, as neither to yield to the temptation, nor to let the adversary know what He wanted. For He neither denied nor asserted Himself to be the Son of God, but convicted him by the authority of Scripture. And note here, from the example of our Lord, how gluttony ought to be resisted, and that we must

[1] Serm. xl. in Cant.

[2] S. Matt. iv. 2.

begin with it, if we would overcome other vices. For it seems, that he who is overcome by gluttony, in vain attacks other vices because of his weakness. For there, the commentator upon this passage in S. Matthew says, "unless gluttony be first overcome, in vain do we struggle with other vices." Then the devil took Him up, and carried Him to Jerusalem, about eighteen miles. I merely give distances in this book on hearsay, and not from personal knowledge of the parts herein mentioned. Consider, then, the goodness and patience of our Lord. For He suffers Himself to be borne and handled by that savage beast, who thirsted for His Blood, and for that of all His loving followers. Then, having placed Him on a pinnacle of the Temple, He tempted Him with vainglory, wishing, as before, to put Him to another test; but here again he was met by the authority of Scripture, and his intention frustrated. As our Lord had during these two temptations given no sign of Divinity, the Enemy, according to S. Bernard, came to the conclusion that He was mere man, and framed the third temptation accordingly. Thence the devil, then, took Him unto a high mountain about two miles from Quarantania, and there he tempted Him with avarice; but here the murderer was again foiled. You have seen how the Lord Jesus was handled and tempted; are you, then, surprised if we are tempted? He endured temptations, too, at other times. Whence S. Bernard says, "Those who reckon but three temptations of our Lord are ignorant of Scripture, for therein we read the life of man upon earth is continual temptation.[1] And the Apostle says that 'He was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin.'"[2]

When He had completed the victory, Angels came and ministered unto Him. Here diligently attend, and behold our Lord as He is eating, and Angels encircling Him, and

[1] Job vii. 1, V. [2] Heb. iv. 15.

consider carefully all things which happened, for they are full of beauty and calculated to excite devotion. And what, I ask, did the angels bring Him to eat after so long a fast? The Scriptures do not tell us. We may, therefore, picture this victorious repast as our devotion leads us. And indeed, if we regard the matter in point of power, the question is solved. For He could create whatever He willed, or have whatever He chose of that which was already created. But we do not find Him exerting this power either for Himself or for His disciples; for the multitude, however, He did employ it, whom He fed in large numbers on two occasions[1] with a few loaves. But of His disciples we read, that in His Presence they plucked the ears of corn from hunger, and did eat them! Likewise, when, wearied with His journey, He sat by the well talking with the Samaritan woman,[2] it is not said that He created food, but that He sent His disciples into the city to buy food. Neither is it likely that He worked a miracle for Himself in the wilderness, for He wrought miracles for the edification of others, and in the presence of many witnesses. But here none were present but the Angels. What line of thought, then, should we pursue about this? Here was no human dwelling-place nor any food prepared. It must have been, then, that the Angels brought Him viands already prepared, as they did to Daniel. For when Habakkuk the prophet had prepared pottage for his reapers, the Angel of the Lord is said to have carried him by the hair of his head from Judæa to Babylon to Daniel, that he might eat, and afterwards in a moment brought him back.[3] Let us pause a while, and look at the subject in this manner, and delight ourselves with our Lord in this His repast, and enter into the sentiments of joy which His most excellent mother would feel,

[1] S. Matt. xiv. 15; xv. 32; S. John vi. 5.
[2] S. John iv.
[3] Bel and the Dragon, 33–39.

if she heard of the triumph of her Son. As soon as Satan is repulsed, angels throng the air, coming in vast multitudes to our Lord Jesus Christ, and prostrating themselves before Him, saying, "Hail, Lord Jesus, our God and our Lord!" And our Lord humbly and benignly receives them, and bows His head, mindful that as man He was made a little lower than the Angels. The Angels say to Him, "O Lord, Thou hast fasted much; what wilt Thou that we shall make ready for Thee?" And some have imagined Him replying, "Go to My dearest mother, and if she has anything prepared, bring it to Me; for of no food do I eat with such pleasure as of that which comes from her hand." Then two of them set out, and in a moment are with her; and when they had saluted her, and informed her for what end they had come, the same legend says they bore away some pottage which she had prepared for herself and Joseph, and some bread, with a table-cloth, and other necessaries; and perhaps the Blessed Mother purchased a few small fish, as far as her means allowed, which also we can imagine that they took with them. On their return the Angels place the viands on the ground, and solemnly pronounce words of benediction. Here regard Him carefully in all that He does. He sits down on the ground composedly, and He partakes of the repast with decorum and sobriety. The Angels stand around, ministering to their Lord. One serves Him with bread, another with wine. another makes ready the small fishes, and others sing one of the songs of Zion, and rejoice and keep festival before Him. If it may be said, however, their festival was mingled with the deepest commiseration, which should mar us also to tears. For they reverently behold Him, and—seeing Him their God and Lord, the Creator of the whole world, "who giveth food to all flesh,"[1] thus humbled, and needing to be sustained with bodily food, and eating as the rest of mankind, they are touched with pity.

[1] Ps. cxxxvi. 25.

And you, too, cry out and say, "O Lord, what great things hast Thou done? all Thy works are marvellous; help me, that I may suffer something for Thee, who hast borne so many and so great things for me." Surely this alone ought to kindle in you a fervent love for Him.

At length the repast was ended, and angels, perhaps, report to His mother what had taken place, and announce to her that He would soon return. And, having accomplished His commands, He said to all, "Return to My Father, and to the land of true joy, for I must for a while continue My pilgrimage; and I pray you, remember Me to My Father, and the whole court of Heaven." And they, prostrating themselves, begged for His benediction, which, when they had received, they returned to their country, and fulfilled His bidding, and noised abroad His victory, so that the whole court of Heaven rejoiced at their tidings. But the Lord Jesus, wishing to return, began to come down from the mountain. Behold Him again attentively; how He walks alone and barefoot—He, the Lord of all—and excite a lively compassion for Him. On His arrival at Jordan, John saw Him coming to him, and said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."[1] This is He upon whom I saw the Holy Spirit rest, when I baptized Him. And on the next day, when he saw Him walking near Jordan, he said again, "Behold the Lamb of God." Then Andrew, and also another of John's disciples, went after Jesus. And the loving Lord, thirsting for their salvation, in order to inspire them with confidence in Himself, turned Himself to them, and said, "What seek ye?" and they replied, "Master, where dwellest Thou?" Then He led them to the house to which He was wont to return in those parts, and they abode with Him that whole day. After that, Andrew brought

[1] S. John i. 29.

Peter, his brother, to Jesus, whom He gladly received; for He knew what He intended to make of him. And He said to him, "Thou shalt be called Cephas;"[1] and then our Lord's intimacy and acquaintance with them commenced. After this, the Lord Jesus willed to return into Galilee, and He accordingly left those parts and commenced His journey. Once more pity Him, and in spirit accompany Him, for He walks barefooted and alone all the way, about fourteen miles. When He reached His home, doubtless His mother, seeing Him, arose at once to greet Him with inexpressible delight, and received Him in her arms with the closest embraces; and He next greeted her, and also His foster-father Joseph, and, perhaps, abode with them as of yore a brief while.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Of the Opening of the Book in the Synagogue.

Up to this point, by the grace of God, we have treated the Life of the Lord Jesus according to the order of events, omitting little or nothing of all that happened to Him, or of His own doings; but I do not intend to pursue the same course hereafter. This Work would become too long, if I were to touch upon all that He said and did, and to attempt to bring all within the compass of these meditations; especially as it is of the greatest moment that we should, after the custom of S. Cecilia, continually bear deeply engraven on our hearts the facts of Christ's life. Let us, then, make choice of some of His actions on which, in

[1] S. John i. 42.

meditation, we may assiduously occupy ourselves up to the time of His Passion; for, after that, nothing must be omitted. Neither ought we to dismiss from consideration anything altogether, or cease to insert it in its right place and time. But I do not intend for the future to treat these meditations at so great a length, except on rare occasions. For it suffices that you place before the eyes of your mind that which was done or said by Him, and that you hold colloquy with Him, and become familiar with Him. For in this seems to consist the greater sweetness and efficacy, and, as it were, the entire fruit of these meditations, that everywhere and always you devoutly behold Him in some act of His; as when, for instance, He stands in the midst of His disciples, and when He is with sinners; when also He speaks to them, when He preaches to the crowd, when He goes out, when He sits, when He sleeps, when He watches, when He eats, when He ministers to others, when He heals the sick, and when He works other miracles. But on these, and on similar occasions, observe all His gestures, and especially the expression of His features, if you can form some conception of it, which seems to me more difficult than anything which has been before mentioned. Observe also attentively whether He, perchance, looks graciously upon you. Recur to what has been said in this chapter for instruction upon all which follows, and whatever I relate hereafter, unless in the meditations in question I suggest a different course, and in those which I shall omit, refer to this place, and it will be a sufficient guide to you. Let us now proceed with the following subjects.

After, then, the Lord Jesus returned from His Baptism, the Master of humility lived in a humble manner, as He had been accustomed to do. He began, however, by degrees to manifest Himself to some, by teaching and preaching in secret. For He is not said to have assumed publicly the

office of preaching during the whole of the following year; namely, not until the miracle which He wrought at the marriage feast, and which happened on the same day as His Baptism, a year after it. And if on some occasions He preached and His disciples baptized, yet neither did He nor His disciples habitually preach before the imprisonment of John, as afterwards they did. In this, giving us an example of amazing lowliness, in humbly deferring to John, who was so greatly His inferior in preaching, as we may piously imagine or conclude from what we have seen before. He did not, then, begin His public ministry with noise and pomp, but humbly and gradually.

On one Sabbath-day, then, when He was in the synagogue with the assembly of the Jews, He stood up to read[1] in the book of Isaiah, and He read the passage where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor."[2] And then, when He had shut the book, He said, "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears." Behold Him, then, how humbly He undertakes the office of reader. With a benign and placid face He reads among them, and expounds the Scripture; and how humbly He begins to manifest Himself, when He says, "This day is this Scripture fulfilled;" that is, "I am He of whom the Prophet speaks." And the eyes of all were fixed upon Him, on account of the efficacy of His words, and His lowly and gracely appearance; for He was most beautiful and most eloquent. Of both the Prophet thus had spoken, "Thou art fairer than the children of men; full of grace are Thy lips."[1]

[1] S. Luke iv. 16. [2] Is. lxi. 1. [1] Ps. xlv. 2.

CHAPTER XIX.

On the Call of the Disciples.

And now the Lord Jesus began to call His disciples, and to make our salvation His anxious concern, always, however, preserving lowliness. He called Peter and Andrew on three different occasions. The first was that to which I have already alluded, when He was at Jordan, when they became to some degree acquainted with Him. The second was from the ship, when they had caught a multitude of fishes, as S. Luke records.[1] The third was from the ship, as S. Matthew relates, when He said, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets and followed Him."[2] Similarly He called James and John, upon those last two occasions before mentioned, and the account is to be found in the same parts of Scripture with those of Peter and Andrew. He called also John at the marriage feast, as S. Jerome says, though in Scripture it is not mentioned. He called also Philip, saying, "Follow Me,"[3] and likewise Matthew the Publican.[4] Of the way the rest were called, there is no record. Consider Him, then, and behold Him as He is thus calling His different disciples, and holding converse with them; how affectionately He calls them, behaving towards them in an affable, homely, indulgent manner, attracting them inwardly and outwardly, introducing them into His mother's house, and sociably visiting their homes. He taught and instructed them, and made them His chief care, as a mother with an only son. It is said,

[1] S. Luke v. 10.
[2] S. Matt. iv. 19.
[3] S. John i. 43.
[4] S. Matt. ix. 9.

and the tradition is ascribed to S. Peter, that whenever He slept in any place with them, rising by night He would look to see if any one of them was uncovered, and would cover them, so tenderly did He love them. For He knew what He was about to make of them; although they were men of mean condition and of humble birth, yet He was about to appoint them princes of the world, and leaders of all the faithful in the spiritual warfare. And consider, on behalf of God, what were the beginnings of the Church. The Lord would not choose the wise and mighty of this world, lest the works which He was about to bring to pass should be attributed to their own worth; these He reserved to Himself, and redeemed us by His own goodness, power, and wisdom.

CHAPTER XX.

Of the Change of Water into Wine at the Marriage Feast.

Though it is uncertain whose marriage it was in Cana of Galilee, as writers have remarked, yet we may suppose, for meditation, that it was that of S. John the Evangelist himself, as S. Jerome seems to affirm in the preface to S. John. The Blessed Virgin was present, not as one of the invited guests, but as an elder sister, and as one of greater dignity; she was in her sister's house as in her own, as manager and mistress of the entertainment. This we gather from three things. First, because it is written that "the mother of Jesus was there," but of Jesus and His disciples that they were invited to the feast, as doubtless all the rest were. Perhaps when the sister of the Blessed Virgin, Mary Salome, the wife of

Zebedee, came to her to Nazareth, which was about fourteen miles from Cana, in order to tell her that she intended to celebrate the marriage of her son John, the Blessed Virgin returned with her some days before the approaching entertainment took place, to make the requisite preparation; hence, whilst others are said to have been invited guests, of her it is only said that she "was there." Secondly, we have a hint to the same effect, in the fact that she was the one who called attention to the deficiency in the supply of wine, which, had she been simply a guest, she would not have done. It is evident that the provisions passed through her hands, and accordingly she knew of the lack. And if she had taken her place as a guest, would she have been by her Son, amongst the men—this modest mother? And, had she been in the company of the women, would she have found out that the wine was running short more than any other? And if she had, would she have risen from the table and gone to her Son? It would have seemed quite unfitting; and therefore it is probable that she was not seated amongst the guests. We are told of her, moreover, that she was ever ready to help others. Thirdly, it may be concluded from this, that she gave orders to the servants to go to her Son, and do whatsoever He bade them; so that it appears that she was in a position of authority, and had the supervision of the feast, and on that account was anxious that there should be sufficient for all.

Viewing, then, the matter in this light, behold the Lord Jesus eating as any one of the people, and sitting in a low place, and not amongst the chief guests, as we may gather from the passage in the Gospel. For, not after the manner of the proud, would He choose out the chief rooms at feasts, for He was soon to teach, "When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, go and sit down in the lowest room."[1] But

[1] S. Luke xiv. 8.

He "began to do," before He began "to teach." Turn now to the Blessed Virgin, and see how promptly and attentively she observes the needs of all, supplying the servants with whatever the guests require, and directing them how to wait upon them. And now, when, at the close of the feast, the servants come to her, saying, "We have no more wine to set before them," she replies, "I will procure you some more; wait a little." And going down to her Son, whom we may depict, as I have said, as sitting humbly at the end of the table, near the door of the room, she said to Him, "My Son, the wine is failing, and our sister is poor, and I know not how we shall get more." But He answered, "Woman, what have I to do with thee?"[1]

This answer seems hard, but it was for our instruction, according to S. Bernard, who says on this passage, "What hast Thou to do with her, O Lord? Art not Thou her Son; she, Thy mother? What hast Thou to do with her, dost Thou ask, Thou Who art the Blessed Fruit of her virginal womb? Is it not she who conceived Thee, and bore Thee, without loss of her virginity? Is it not she, in whose womb Thou remainedst for nine months, at whose virgin breasts Thou didst suck, with whom, when twelve years old, Thou didst go down from Jerusalem and to whom Thou wast subject? How is it, then, O Lord, that Thou dealest so severely with her by saying, 'What have I to do with thee?' Much in every way hast Thou to do with her. But now I see plainly that, not as indignant with her, or as desiring to confound the tender bashfulness of the virgin and mother, Thou saidst, 'What have I to do with thee?' For when the servants came to Thee, at her bidding, Thou didst do without hesitation what she suggested. Why, then, brethren, why did He first give her such an answer? Evidently on our account, and for the sake of others who have been

[1] S. John ii. 4.

turned to the Lord, that the care of earthly parents should not render us too anxious, and that natural affections may not hinder the exercises of the spiritual life. For, so long as we are in the world, it is our duty to take care of our parents; but when we have forsaken ourselves, surely we should be free from anxiety respecting others. Thus, we read of a hermit who lived in the desert, that, when his brother came to him to seek his advice, he desired him to apply to another brother, who had died long before. Whereupon his brother remarked with surprise that he was dead; and the hermit replied, 'So am I also.' In the best manner, then, our Lord hath taught us not to be anxious about our relations more than religion requires, by the way He replied to His mother—and to such a mother!—'Woman, what have I to do with thee?' In another place, too, when some one announced to Him that His mother and brethren stood without, desirous to speak to Him, He answered, 'Who is My mother, and who are My brethren?'[1] Where, then, are those who have such a carnal and vain anxiety about their relations, as if they still lived together?"[2] Thus far S. Bernard.

His mother did not suffer herself to be discouraged by this reply, but, relying on His benignity, returned to the servants and said, "Go to my Son, and whatsoever He saith unto you, do it." And they went, and filled the water-pots with water, as the Lord had bidden them. When this was done, He said to them, "Draw out now, and bear to the governor of the feast." But in this, first note our Lord's discretion, for He sent first to him who occupied the seat of honour. Secondly, he sat at some distance from Him, for His command is, "bear" it to the governor of the feast, as though he were some way off. For as he sat in the chief place, we can gather that our Lord did not wish to

[1] S. Matt. xii. 48. [2] Serm. ii. in Dom. 1 Epiph.

sit near him, but chose for Himself the lowest place. The servants then delivered the wine to him, and to the rest, disclosing the miracle, since they knew about it, and His disciples believed in Him. When the feast was ended, so the story runs, the Lord Jesus called John apart, and said to him, "Leave this your wife, and follow Me, for I will lead you to higher nuptials." And John followed Him. By His presence at a wedding-feast our Lord approved carnal marriage as ordained of God. But in this, that He called John from it, He clearly gave us to understand that spiritual marriage is far more sublime.

After this, the Lord Jesus departed from thence, purposing from henceforth to be occupied publicly and openly with the work of our salvation. But first, it may be, He would conduct His mother to her home, for it was meet that the Blessed Virgin should have His company on the journey. Whereupon He takes her, and John, and His other disciples, and they enter into Capernaum, which is near Nazareth, and after some days they reach Nazareth. Behold them, then, on the road; how they walk together, the mother and the Son; how humbly they go on their way, and on foot, but very lovingly. O how great that Son! How pure that mother! Behold the disciples reverently following, and listening to the words of the Lord. For He was never idle, but was always engaged in saying or doing something good. It was not possible for His fellow-travellers, in such company, to grow fatigued.

CHAPTER XXI.

Of our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, which He began by speaking of Poverty.

THE Lord Jesus, having called together His disciples, and drawn them apart from the crowd, went up with them into Mount Tabor, about two leagues from Nazareth, that He might impart to them His Doctrine; for it was fitting that He should teach them first and before others, as He was about to make them the masters and guides over others. Then He instructed them in many things, in a sermon full of beauty and richness; and no marvel, for the mouth of the Lord delivered it. He taught them the Beatitudes, and about prayer, fasting, and almsdeeds, and many other truths concerning virtues, which you can find in the Gospel itself.[1] You should read it diligently and frequently, and commit to memory the record of it, for it is the essence of all that is spiritual. I do not intend here to go through the whole of it, because it would be too long; nor would such a mode of exposition fall in with the purpose of these meditations. I shall, however, for your edification intersperse some moral reflections here and there, both as they occur to me, and as quotations from the Saints suggest them. Let it suffice here to remark, that the Lord at the very beginning of this Sermon speaks of poverty, giving us to understand thereby, that poverty is the primary foundation of all spiritual discipline. By no means, then, can any one truly follow Christ, the mirror of poverty, when he is loaded with earthly riches. He is not free, but a slave, whose mind is under

[1] S. Matt. v., vi., vii.

the dominion of temporal things. Therefore He says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," etc. For of the thing which I affectionately love, I make myself, of my own will, the slave. For love, as S. Augustine says,[1] is a weight of the soul, and bears it whither it is carried itself. And nothing should be loved except God or for God. Truly, therefore, it is said, "Blessed are the poor," for they set no value on anything for God's sake, and thus their union with Him is very close. But of this poverty S. Bernard[2] says thus: "Poverty is a sort of powerful wing, with which we can swiftly fly to the kingdom of Heaven. For in the other virtues which follow, the promise points to some future time; but with poverty it is not so much a promise as a gift, for it is said of the poor, "theirs *is* the kingdom of heaven." Again he says, "For we see some who are poor, who, were they truly so, would not be found so pusillanimous and depressed, when they might be kings, yea, kings of heaven. But there are some who are willing to become poor, but only with the provision that they are to want for nothing, and who love poverty, only that they might not suffer distress." Elsewhere the same Saint says,[3] "'And I, if I be lifted up, will'—I boldly assert—'draw all to Me.'[4] For I do not rashly adopt the speech of my Brother, if I am clothed with His likeness. And if this be so, let not the rich of this world think that the brethren of Christ only have heavenly treasures, because they hear Him say, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' For these poor possess the earth; as, indeed, having nothing, and yet possessing all things; not begging as in a condition of wretchedness, but possessing as lords, and the more lords, the less they covet anything. To a faithful man, the whole world is a store of riches; the whole, I say, for both its

[1] Confession xiii. c. ix.
[2] Serm. iv. de Adventu.
[3] Serm. xxi. super Cant.
[4] S. John xii. 32.

adversity and its prosperity are alike subservient to him, and work together for his good. The avaricious man hungers for earthly possessions, like a beggar; the faithful man despises them, as a lord. The one, by possessing them, becomes a beggar; the other, by despising them, preserves them. Question any one of those, who with insatiable longing pant after worldly gain, as to what he thinks of those who sell all their goods and give them to the poor, that they may gain the kingdom of heaven for their earthly substance; whether he judges them to act wisely or not? Wisely, he will without doubt decide. Ask him then why he does not himself follow the course of which he has expressed his approval? 'I cannot,' he will say. But why? Surely, because avarice, as a mistress, will not permit him; because he is not free, he has no right to the things which he seems to possess, nor can he call them his own. If they are indeed yours, turn them to account, and exchange earthly for heavenly treasures. If you say, 'I cannot,' I shall say, then you are not the master of your wealth, but it is your master; you are its steward, not its proprietor." Thus far S. Bernard.

But let us return to our meditation. Behold, then, and observe the Lord Jesus humbly sitting on the ground on the mountain, and His disciples round Him; how He was among them, as if one of them; and how affectionately, kindly, beautifully, and effectively He speaks to them, attracting them to the acts of the several virtues of which He speaks. And on every occasion, as I have before advised, try to contemplate His Face. Regard, too, His disciples, how humbly, reverently, and with what fixedness of mind they behold Him, and hearken to His wondrous words, and commit them to memory, and see what delight they enjoy in His every utterance and glance. In this contemplation, you try to share that sweetness of communion with Him, as if you

yourself saw Him speaking, and were ready, at His bidding, to draw closer to His side, and to stay as long as the Lord permits you.

At the end of the sermon, behold the Lord Jesus, together with His disciples, coming down from the mount; and how, as He went on His way, the crowd of poor people in flocks follow Him, not in any formal procession, but as the hen is followed by her chickens, so that, whoever was able, might get near Him, and hear the better what He was saying. See also the crowds coming lovingly to meet Him, and bringing their sick to be restored. "And He healed them all."

CHAPTER XXII.

Of the Centurion's Servant, and the Nobleman's Son, cured by Christ.

Now there was at Capernaum a certain centurion, that is, a captain of a hundred men, and he had a servant sick. And being full of faith, he sent to the Lord Jesus, in order that He might heal him.[1] But the humble Lord replied, "I will come and heal him." When the centurion knew this, he sent back to Him, saying, "Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldest enter under my roof; but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed." On this Jesus commended his faith, and went no further, but healed the servant at a distance. But when, in the same city, a certain nobleman, that is, a petty ruler, went in person to Jesus and besought Him to come to his house and heal his sick

[1] S. Matt. viii. 5; S. Luke vii. 2.

son, Jesus declined to go, and chose to perform the cure at a distance. Here consider the value of faith in the case of the centurion, and the humility of the Lord, who willed to go Himself to the servant, but avoided the house of pomp and state. See, then, that we ought not to accept persons. Our Lord was ready to honour by His presence the soldier's servant more than the ruler's son. We ought, then, to beware of eye-service, and not to be influenced by external magnificence; we should rather look to the intention and goodness of him who may need our services, and not be guided by complaisance in our charitable actions but by charity.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Of the Palsied Man, who is let down through the Roof and healed by the Lord.

In the city of which we have just spoken, Capernaum, whilst the Lord Jesus was teaching in a certain house, surrounded by Pharisees and doctors of the law, who had come out of every town of Judæa and Jerusalem, there came some people bearing a paralytic man, and wishing to bring him into the house that he might be healed by the Lord. When, on account of the crowd, they were unable to force an entrance, they went up to the roof of the house, and let him down from thence, and placed him before Jesus. And the Lord Jesus, seeing their faith, said, "Thy sins be forgiven thee." But the Pharisees and doctors of the law, who were maliciously watching Him, said within themselves that He blasphemed against God; for God only

can forgive sins, and this power Christ attributed to Himself, whom they believed to be mere man. The kind and lowly Lord, who searcheth the hearts and reins of men, answered, "Why think ye evil in your hearts?" And He added, "That ye may know that the Son of Man hath power upon earth to forgive sins,"[1] etc.

There are four points here for meditation. First, the penetrating power of the mind of Christ, who saw their thoughts. Secondly, that sicknesses are often the result of sins, and that absolution from the sins sometimes brings deliverance from their effects. There is another instance of this, in the sick man healed at the pool of Bethesda, to whom our Lord said, "Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee."[2] Thirdly, consider how great is the worth of faith. Even though it be the faith not of oneself but of another it is of avail, as we have just seen in the case of the centurion's servant, and, as we shall presently see, in that of the woman of Canaan, through whose faith her daughter was healed. This takes place daily in the baptism of infants, who, if they die before they reach years of discretion, receive, through the faith of their sponsors, an earnest whereby they are saved through Christ's merits—a doctrine opposed by the accursed teaching of some heretics. Fourthly, we ought to meditate upon our Lord sitting in the midst of them, and gently answering His malicious opponents, and working the miracle; in doing this, recur to the general rules which I have already laid down.

[1] S. Luke v. 17; S. Mark ii. 3; S. Matt. ix. 1.
[2] S. John v. 14.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Of the Restoration of Simon's Mother-in-law.

It came to pass that the Lord Jesus, in this same city of Capernaum, turned aside into the house of Simon Peter, where his mother-in-law lay sick with severe fever.[1] Our humble Lord went to her and graciously touched her hand, and cured her, so that she arose immediately, and ministered to Him and His disciples. But what she gave them we are not told. Imagine, then, that in the house of a poor man, only coarse food would be at hand for the Lover of poverty, such as could quickly be prepared and got ready. Contemplate the Lord Jesus helping in this preparation of the viands, especially as it was in the house of a disciple. Imagine Him fulfilling various humble offices, such as laying the cloth, washing the things, and the like. For such things this Master of humility would do, who "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister." Behold Him seated familiarly amongst the rest at the table, and cheerfully partaking of what was set before them, especially of the food, in which poverty, which He loved so well, was most conspicuous.

[1] S. Matt. viii. 14; S. Mark i. 29.

CHAPTER XXV.

Of the Sleep of our Lord in the Boat.

THE Lord Jesus, entering into a boat with His disciples, placed His head on the pillow, and composed Himself to sleep.[1] For He was in the habit of spending a great part of His nights in prayer and watching, and of His days in the laborious employment of preaching. And whilst He slept a tempest arose, and His disciples were afraid that they were in danger of perishing; but they dared not to awake Him. At last, urged by fear, they did awake Him, saying, "Lord, save us; we perish." And He arose, and reproached them for their little faith; and He rebuked the sea and the winds, and the tempest subsided.

In those acts behold and contemplate our Lord, according to the general rule, which I have already laid down and committed to you. Here there is a special consideration to be added—that, although He may at times seem to be asleep and regardless both of us and of our concerns, especially when we are in tribulation, yet He is really keeping a most diligent watch over us, and guarding us. And therefore we ought always to have a firm and unhesitating faith.

[1] S. Matt. viii. 23; S. Mark iv. 38; S. Luke viii. 22.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Of the Raising of the Widow's Son by our Lord.

As once the Lord Jesus was going towards the city of Nain,[1] He met a concourse of people, bearing to the grave the body of a young man, the son of a widow. Then the compassionate Lord Jesus was moved with pity, and touched the bier, "and they that bare him stood still." And He said, "Young man, I say unto thee, arise." And he that was dead immediately arose, and He delivered him to his mother. "And there came a fear on all, and they glorified God." Go over these points of meditation as before.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Of the Resurrection of a Young Girl, and how the Woman with an Issue was healed.

On the entreaty of a certain ruler, the Lord Jesus went with him to heal his daughter. And a great multitude accompanied Him, among whom was a woman, grievously afflicted, who is said to have been Martha,[2] the sister of Mary Magdalen. "She said within herself, If I may but touch His garment, I shall be whole."[3] Accordingly, approaching Him with fear, she touched, and was freed from her complaint. But the Lord Jesus said, "Who touched Me?" And Peter answered, "Master, the multitude throng Thee and press

[1] S. Luke vii. 11.

[2] Another legend assigns to this woman the name Veronica.

[3] S. Matt. ix. 20.

Thee, and sayest Thou, Who touched Me?" See here the patience of the Lord, Who often suffered from the presence of the crowd, for they were desirous to get near Him. But Jesus knew what He said, and again said, "I perceive that virtue is gone out of Me." Then Martha made known the whole matter. Our Lord willingly worked the cure, and afterwards was pleased to admit her to close intimacy with Himself. And then He said to her, "Thy faith hath made thee whole." You have here in this miracle our Lord's commendation of faith; and you further see that the Lord would make His miracles to be known for the common good; but His own part in them, for the sake of humility, He hid, for in this instance what He wrought through Divine power He imputed to her faith.

Further, we have, in S. Bernard's mode of introducing the subject, a great help towards preserving lowliness. "Every perfect servant of the Lord may be called the hem, as being the lowest part of our Lord's garment, on account of the mean estimate he has of himself." He who, then, has reached this state, and perceives that he is heard by our Lord in curing the diseased, or working other miracles, let him not vaunt himself on that account, nor attribute it to himself, because not himself, but the Lord, hath wrought the wonder. For though Martha in this instance touched the hem of His garment, by touching which she trusted that she would be healed, and so it came to pass; yet it was not out of the hem, but from the Lord, the power of healing went forth. And therefore Christ said, "I perceive that virtue is gone out of *Me*." Mind, then, and never again ascribe anything good to yourself, because the whole is from the Lord Jesus. After this, the Lord Jesus went to the ruler's house, and found that his daughter was dead, and raised her to life again.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Of the Conversion of Mary Magdalen, and other things.

Our Lord, the very model of courtesy, one day accepted the invitation of Simon the leper,[1] and went to dine with him, as He was wont to do, out of courtesy and kindness, and out of the zeal which He had for the salvation of souls, for which end He had come down from heaven. Therefore he eat with men and conversed with them in order to draw them to the love of Himself. The love of poverty was also an inducement. For he was very poor, and had nothing of this world's substance for Himself and His companions. Humbly and thankfully, then, did Jesus, the mirror of humility, accept invitations as occasion offered. But Mary Magdalen, hearing that our Lord sat at meat in the house of Simon, and having probably had some previous acquaintance with His preaching, and having been drawn to love Him ardently, though she had not yet given expression to her affection, smitten with deep sorrow of heart for her sins, and enkindled with the fire of His love, convinced that without Him she could not be saved, and resolving to delay no longer—went straight into the place where they were eating, and with her face turned towards the ground, and with downcast look, passed before all the guests, and did not stop until she came to the spot where her beloved Lord was. Then she prostrated herself at His feet, filled with heartfelt sorrow and deep shame for her sins, and she bent down and laid her face over His feet, with a certain con-

[1] S. Luke vii. 36.

fidence, for already she felt that she loved Him above all things; and she began, with a flood of tears and strong sobs, to say within herself, not audibly, "My Lord, I firmly believe, confess, and acknowledge that Thou art my God and my Lord. Many and great have been my offences against Thy Majesty, yea, my sins are more in number than the sand of the sea; but I—a wicked, sinful woman—flee for refuge to Thy mercy. I grieve and am filled with compunction for the past; I beseech Thy pardon; I resolve to amend, and never again to disobey Thy precepts. Oh, let me not suffer a repulse from Thee, for there is no other to whom I can turn for refuge; nor do I wish that there might be any other, for I love Thee only and above all things. Do not then cast me away from Thee, but punish me for my sins in whatever way Thou wilt; yet grant me forgiveness." All the while the flood-gates were open, and the feet of Christ were being bathed and washed with her tears. From this incident you can plainly conclude that the Lord Jesus was barefoot. At length restraining her tears, and judging it unseemly that her tears should thus fall on His feet, she wiped them with her hair. With her hair, indeed, for she had nothing more precious with her with which to wipe them; and also because that which had formerly ministered to vanity, she would now fain turn to a better use. Moreover, she would not move her face far from the feet of her Lord, which with increasing affection she kissed lovingly again and again. And because the feet of the Lord were soiled with dust from His frequent journeys, she anointed them with costly ointment. Look, then, attentively at her, and meditate carefully upon these things, because of her devotion, who was so singularly beloved by our Lord; and also, remember this was a very solemn feast. Behold, also, the Lord Jesus, how patiently He receives her, and how patiently He bears all that she

does. He ceases and pauses from eating, until she has done. The guests also pause, and all wonder at this novelty. But Simon sharply censured Him in his heart, because He allowed Himself to be touched by such a woman, as if He could not be a prophet, nor have known who she was. Our Lord, then, by replying to the thoughts of his heart, manifested that He was a true prophet, and convicted him by the example of the debtors. And, desiring to show openly that all things are perfected in love, He said, "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much." And He said to her, "Go in peace." O delightful and sweet utterance! how gladly did Magdalen hear it, and how happily did she withdraw! And now, perfectly converted, she henceforth led a holy and virtuous life, and with constancy clung to Jesus.

Meditate, then, on these points diligently, and try to imitate this so great charity, which is highly commended by our Lord both in word and in deed. For here you have a distinct proof that charity re-establishes peace between God and a sinner; whence S. Peter says that "charity covereth the multitude of sins."[1] Seeing that charity is the soul of every virtue, and that nothing is pleasing to God without it, I will bring forward some authorities concerning it, for the purpose of making you strive with all your might to acquire it, and that will render you acceptable to your spouse, Christ Jesus. S. Bernard says of it, "Charity must be the most excellent gift, and plainly above all others, for the heavenly Bridegroom so repeatedly enforces it on His new spouse. Now, He says, 'By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another.'[2] Again He says, 'A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another.'[3] Again, 'This is My commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you.'[4] Also, praying

[1] 1 Pet. iv. 8. [2] S. John xiii. 35. [3] Ibid. 34. [4] Ibid. xv. 12.

that they 'might be one, even as He and the Father are one.'"[1]

And a little after, S. Bernard says, "In short, what can be compared with this grace, which is preferred to martyrdom itself, and to the faith which can remove mountains? This, then, is that which I say, Let peace be to you from within you, and nothing from without which may seem to threaten you shall terrify you, for it has no power to hurt you."[2] Again, "Let the excellence of a soul be measured by the charity which it possesses: for instance, the soul which has much charity, is great; the soul which has little, is little; the soul which has none, is nothing; as the Apostle testifies, 'If I have not charity, I am nothing.'[3] If, however, the soul begin to have ever so small a quantity, so that it cares at least to love those who love it, and to salute its brethren and those who salute it, I would not assert that a soul in such a state was 'nothing,' retaining as it did, in giving and receiving at least, social charity. Yet, according to the saying of our Lord, 'What does it do more than others?' I cannot, then, think such a soul broad or great, but on the contrary narrow and little, when I find in it such a scant portion of charity. But should it enlarge and progress, so as to pass beyond the limits of this narrow and contracted love, and to embrace with full liberty of spirit the broad range of disinterested bounty, and to stretch itself so far with generous affection as to include within its bosom every neighbour, loving every one as itself, can it be still rightly said, 'What dost thou more than others?' Forsooth, such an one has made itself broad; has made broad, I say, the bosom of charity, which embraces all, even those who are not joined to us by ties of blood; those, too, who do not allure us by any hope of reward, and to whom we are not bound by claims of the past; those to

[1] S. John xvii. 22. [2] Serm. 29 in Cant. [3] 1 Cor. xiii. 2.

whom we are not under any obligation, unless it be that of which we read, 'Owe no man anything, but to love one another.'[1] But if you will reach out still further, and as a pious invader attack the kingdom of charity at every point, and occupy it to its utmost extent, do not close your bowels of compassion even to your enemies, but 'do good to them that hate you, pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you,'[2] and try even to be peaceful with those who hate peace;[3] then, indeed, the breadth and height and beauty of your soul shall be like the breadth and height and beauty of the firmament. Then shall be fulfilled in it that which is spoken, 'He spreadeth out the heavens like a curtain.'[4] And in this heaven of such wonderful breadth and height and beauty, the most High, Infinite, and Glorious God shall deign not only to dwell, but—so spacious is it—to walk therein." Thus far S. Bernard. You have seen, then, how useful and necessary a virtue charity is, without which it is quite impossible to please God, and with which without doubt every one can become pleasing in His sight. Therefore, with all your heart, with all your mind, and with all your strength, endeavour to gain it, for it will make you willingly undergo every hardship and all that is painful for the sake of God and your neighbour.

CHAPTER XXIX.

How John sent his Disciples to Jesus.

THE glorious soldier and forerunner of the Lord Jesus, John Baptist, was fettered and put in prison by Herod, for his defence of the truth, because he had rebuked him, for taking

[1] Rom. xiii. 8. [2] S. Matt. v. 44. [3] Ps. cxx. 6. [4] Ibid. civ. 2.

the wife of his brother who was still alive. Desirous of inducing his disciples to follow the Lord Jesus, he thought that he would send them to Him, so that, by hearing His words and seeing His actions, they might be inflamed with the love of Him and attach themselves to Him. They went, then, to Jesus, and said to Him in the name of John, "Art thou He that should come, or do we look for another?"[1] Now, the Lord Jesus had at that time a great crowd about Him. Behold Him, then, fixedly, how with calm face He receives the messengers of John, and how wisely He answers them—first by deeds, then by words. For in their presence He healed the deaf and dumb and blind, and did many other miracles, and preached to the people, and afterwards, amongst other things, said to John's disciples, "Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see." And they returned to John and related to him these things, and he heard them most gladly. And these disciples, after the death of John, attached themselves most firmly to Christ. On their departure the Lord Jesus commended John most highly before the people, saying that he was more than a prophet, and that amongst those born of women there had not risen a greater than he; and He went on to say other things as recorded in the Gospel. Look, then, continually at the Lord Jesus, both whilst He is preaching and when working the miracles before mentioned, and at all times, in the manner I have already suggested to you.

[1] S. Matt. xi. 3.

CHAPTER XXX.

Of the Death of John the Baptist.

This will be a fitting time to meditate on the death of S. John the Baptist. When, then, that most wicked Herod and his infamous adulteress had, perhaps, conspired together to put him to death, that he might no longer reproach them, it happened that at a feast day, when the wretched daughter, Herodias, danced and pleased Herod, that the head of John the Baptist was granted her. And accordingly he was beheaded in the prison. Behold how great a man the Baptist was, and how shamefully and unjustly he fell beneath the tyranny of a reign of wickedness. O God, how was it that Thou didst permit this? What shall we think of John dying in this manner—John, whose perfection and sanctity were so great that he was mistaken for Christ? If, then, it is your mind to enter into this subject, consider first the baseness of his murderers, and then the greatness of John and his singular eminence, and you may well call out the affection of wonder.

You have heard, in a former chapter, how John was commended by our Lord in many respects; hear now what S. Bernard says of him. "The first Church[1] of all, after the names of the Saviour, takes that of S. John. It was, indeed, fit that the singular friend of the Bridegroom should also be exalted with His Spouse, the Church. Peter was crucified, Paul was beheaded, yet the dignity of precedence was given to the Forerunner. Rome is empurpled with the blood of martyrs, and sublime honours were bestowed

[1] He refers to S. John Lateran.

on that holy patriarchate. Still John stands pre-eminent, with a singular greatness, and wonderful above all.

"Who so gloriously announced? Who so filled with the Holy Ghost in his mother's womb? Who is said to have leapt with joy when yet unborn? Whose nativity does the Church celebrate as his? Who ever so loved solitude? Who ever conversed with others so sublimely? Who first preached penitence and the kingdom of heaven? Who baptized the King of Glory? To whom was the Trinity so clearly revealed? To whom did the Lord Jesus Christ ever give such testimony? Whom has the Church so honoured? John is a patriarch; yes, the end and chief of Patriarchs. John is a prophet, yea, more than a prophet, because he not only foretold, but pointed out Christ. John is an angel, yes, elect among angels, for the Saviour testifies, saying, 'Behold, I send My Angel,'[1] etc. John is an apostle, yes, first and foremost amongst Apostles, the first man 'sent from God.'[2] John is an Evangelist, yes, the first herald of the Gospel, a preacher preaching the Gospel of the kingdom of God. John is a Virgin, yes, a remarkable mirror of virginity, a type of modesty, a pattern of chastity. John is a Martyr, and more, the light of martyrs—between the Birth and Death of Christ, an heroic form of martyrdom. He is 'the voice of one crying in the wilderness,'[3] the Forerunner of the Judge, the Herald of the Word.' He is Elias—'the law and the prophets were until John;' he is 'a burning and a shining light.'[4] I pass by in silence his relation to the nine orders of angels, and the more than Seraphic dignity with which he is invested."[5] Thus far S. Bernard. Hear now his praises by Peter Chrysogonus,[6] Archbishop of Ravenna, in a cer-

[1] Messenger is "angelum" in Vulg. [2] 1 John i. 6.
[3] S. John i. 23. [4] S. John v. 35.
[5] The authorship is doubtful. [6] Or "Chrysologus."

tain sermon in which he says, "John is a school of virtues, the master of spiritual life, a pattern of sanctity, a rule of justice," etc. If, then, you contrast John's pre-eminent dignity and sanctity with the depth of their villainy who murdered him, you will indeed find matter for wonder and indignation, if such a thing were allowable, with God. For to what and how great a personage is the common executioner sent, as if to some vile and infamous assassin or plunderer. Regard the Baptist, then, reverently and with sorrow; how he prepares his neck at the bidding of the worthless and abominable executioner, how humbly he bends his knees, and, giving thanks to God, lays his sacred head upon the block or stone, and patiently receives the strokes until it is severed from his body. Behold, such is the end of John, the intimate friend and near relative of the Lord Jesus, in whom were lodged the deep secrets of God. With what great shame ought his example to affect us, who lose patience in the slightest trials? John, who was innocent, met death—and such a death, too—with patience; and we, who are for the most part guilty of great sins, and deserve the wrath of God, are not able to bear the smallest injuries and grievances, nay, not even injurious words.

The Lord Jesus was at that time in Judæa, but not near that part. When the death of John was reported to Him, our Divine Lord wept for His champion and relation; the disciples also wept with Him, and, possibly, so did the Blessed Virgin, who had received him at his birth, and had always most tenderly loved him. We can imagine how the Lord consoled His mother, and her lament, "My Son, why did You not defend him from such a death?" and the reply, "Loving mother, such a defence would not have been expedient; for he has died for My Father, and on behalf of His Just Law, but he will quickly be in glory.

For the Father Himself does not purpose to defend His own in this world in such a manner; because they are not long to continue here—their country is not here, but in heaven. John is now freed from the chains of the flesh; nor can he die any more. The enemy raged against him as far as he could, but he shall reign with My Father for ever. Therefore, dearest mother, be consoled, for it is well with John for ever." Some days after this, the Lord Jesus left those parts and returned to Galilee. Dwell, then, on all that we have said, and be in spirit present at those scenes, and meditate devoutly upon them, and whithersoever the Lord goes, go also.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Of the Conversation with the Samaritan Woman.

When the Lord Jesus returned from Judæa into Galilee, He travelled seventy miles or more, and passed through Samaria, wearied with His journey. Behold Him, your God, how fatigued He is! He thus often walks, often is weary, and His whole life is full of toil. Then He sat by the well, and rested Himself; but His disciples went away into the town to seek for bread. Then came a certain woman—she is said to have been named Lucia—to the well for water. And the Lord began to converse with her, and to treat of sublime truths, and to manifest Himself to her.

What He said to her, how the disciples returned, how at the saying of the woman the people of the city came out to meet Him, how He went with them, stayed for a while, and then departed, I do not intend to relate; for it is all clearly set forth in the Gospel history. Read it, then, and behold

the Lord Jesus Himself in all His actions. But from this account you may note certain beautiful and useful things. And first see the humility of our Lord; how the humble Lord remained quite alone and unattended during the absence of His disciples, for they were on familiar terms with Him; then, how humbly He talked with this unhappy woman by herself, and treated of such great mysteries, and conversed with her, as if His equal. For He did not disdain her, but, on the contrary, He answered her in such a manner as would have been wonderful even if He had been addressing an assembly of the wisest men. The proud do not act thus. For if they pour forth swelling words before a few, much less before one, they regard them as wasted, and count their hearers unworthy of them.

Secondly, consider His poverty and affliction of the body, and the humility which accompanied them. For here you are told how the disciples went away to the city to seek bread, and, having obtained it, how they brought it to Him, and wanted Him to eat. But where did He eat? No doubt at the well, or by some river or spring. See, then, how He refreshed Himself, wearied and famished as He was. And do not imagine that this was the only occasion when He so acted, but His general custom. Whence you can plainly conclude, that the humble Lord and lover of poverty often took His meals in the open air outside the dwellings of men, by some stream or spring, however tired or prostrated He might be. He was provided with no dainty food, no fine cups, no delicate wines, but with pure water from the spring or river. He who caused the vineyards to be fertile, who created the springs, and all that move in the waters, sat humbly on the ground, and took His meals as any poor man. In the third place, consider how intent he was on spiritual things. For when His disciples invited Him to eat, He said, "I have meat to eat

that ye know not of. My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work;"[1] nor would He eat, until He had received the people who came from the city and preached to them, desirous of first attending to the needs of the soul before taking bodily refreshment, though He stood so greatly in need of it. Behold Him, then, in all the actions which have been mentioned, and strive to imitate His virtues.

CHAPTER XXXII.

How they wished to cast our Lord down headlong from the brow of the Hill.

When the Lord Jesus Christ had returned to Nazareth, and the inhabitants wanted Him to work miracles, He showed them that they were not worthy to see them; which so kindled them with rage, that they drove Him out of the city.[2] The meek Lord then fled before them, and they pursued Him. What think you of this? To such a height did their fury burn and increase, that they dragged Him to the top of the hill, that from thence they might cast Him down headlong. But the Lord, by Divine power passing through the midst of them, went His way; for the time when He had appointed to die had not yet come. There is a tradition, that when our Lord had escaped out of their hands, He went down the hill, and hid Himself in a cavern,—the rock, as wax, yielding to Him as He entered, and providing Him with shelter, and that traces of His garments were left imprinted on the stone. Behold Him, then, flying before them, and hidden in the rock; pity His sufferings, and endeavour to imitate His patience and lowliness.

[1] S. John iv. 34.

[2] S. Luke iv. 29.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Of the Man who had a Withered Hand, and was healed by the Lord.

On one of the Sabbath days the Lord Jesus was teaching in the synagogue, and there was a man there who had a withered hand, and Jesus made him stand forth in the midst, and then asked the doctors whether it were lawful to do good on the Sabbath day. But they made Him no answer. Then said Jesus to the man who had the withered hand, "Stretch forth thy hand,"[1] and he was healed. Many times the Lord wrought miracles on the Sabbath days, to confound the Jews, who carnally interpreted the law, which God would have kept according to the spirit. For it was not intended that on the Sabbath days that good works, and deeds of charity, should be forbidden, but sinful actions and servile work. But they were greatly offended at Him on this account, and conspired against Him, saying, "This man is not from God, for He does not keep the Sabbath day." But our Lord did not therefore cease from working; nay, rather He worked the more on the Sabbath, that He might draw them out of their error. Consider Him, then, performing the actions which we have just mentioned, and after His example do not desist from good works, even though another should be unjustly scandalized thereby. For a good work which is necessary for a soul's salvation, or spiritual advancement, you ought not to leave off, for fear of offending another. But when it is a question of mere bodily satisfaction, according to the law of perfect charity, we

[1] S. Luke vi. 10.

ought to abstain, if it give offence to a brother. Wherefore the Apostle says in the Epistle to the Romans, "It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak."[1]

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Of the Multiplication of the Loaves, and how God provides for those who love Him.

On two occasions it is recorded, that our benign Lord multiplied a few loaves, and with them satisfied many thousands of men.[2] But combine them into one meditation, and in it consider the words and deeds of Christ. Jesus said, then, "I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat; and if I send them away fasting to their own houses, they will faint by the way, for divers of them came from far." Whereupon He multiplied the loaves, so that all eat abundantly. Here you have many good things to meditate upon, and especially how merciful, gracious, and kind the Lord Jesus was, and with what discretion and consideration He acted.

First, how merciful He was, for it was mercifulness which drew Him to help them, and therefore He says, "I have compassion on the multitude." For "the earth is full of His mercy."[3]

Secondly, He was gracious and courteous in the cause which He assigns; "For behold," says He, "they have now

[1] Rom. xiv. 21. [2] S. Matt. xv. 32; Mark viii. 1; S. John vi. 5.
[3] Ps. xxxiii. 5.

been with Me three days." See the courteousness and wonderful grace of His behaviour. For He speaks as though He were under an obligation to them for remaining so long with Him, whereas, in truth, it was for their own good, and not for His. Yes, so it is, as He elsewhere says, "My delights are with the sons of men,"[1] though it bring no advantage to Himself, but works our salvation. But those who follow Him, and keep His precepts and counsels, the Lord loves; nor will He close His hand against them, but will succour them according to their needs.

Thirdly, He showed discretion and circumspection, in that He considered their wants and their infirmity; how, if He sent them away fasting, they would faint, and how certain of them had come from a long distance. You observe, then, how wise and full of sweetness those words were. But spiritually we are daily in a like condition. For we have nothing to eat unless He give it; and we faint by the way, if He send us away fasting; and without Him we cannot provide for ourselves in any spiritual matter. We have no ground, then, for self-complacency, when we receive any consolation from the hand of the Lord, or when we are conscious of any progress in our spiritual life; because it is not from ourselves, but from Him. And therefore, if we are observant, we shall notice, that the more perfect the servants of God are, the nearer to Himself and the more rich in His gifts, the more humble they are, for they ascribe nothing to themselves, but their own sins and defects. For the nearer any one approaches to God, the more he is illuminated, and therefore the more clearly does he see the majesty and mercy of God; and so in him pride or vainglory can have no place, for they proceed from blindness of ignorance. For no one who has a true knowledge of God or of himself, and examines himself, can be proud. It is a long road by

[1] Prov. viii. 31. V.

which we came to God: I speak especially of myself and of others who are like me, who had gone away from Him into a far country, through our sins. Any one, then, who returns to Him may be truly said to come from afar.

After the words of Christ which we have alluded to, He proceeded to actions. Behold Him, then, how He took the loaves, and gave thanks to the Father, and gave them to the disciples to set before the multitude, and in their hands multiplied them, so that all eat as much as they pleased, and many fragments were left. Consider, then, how He looked on them as they eat, and delighted in their enjoyment. Behold them also, how they wondered at the miracle, and how they talk together and rejoice together about it, eating with thanksgiving, so that not only their bodies, but also, at least in the case of some among them, their souls received refreshment. But was the Blessed Virgin there, and did she joyously hand the bread to the women, and delight in their satisfaction? Scripture does not say Meditate, then, on this miracle, as the Lord enables you.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Of our Lord's Flight, when they would make Him a King; and against the Love of Honours of the World.

After the Lord had fed the multitude, as mentioned in the previous chapter, they sought to make Him a king.[1] For they concluded that He was capable of relieving their necessities, and that under such a king it seemed to them that they could never want. But the Lord Jesus, knowing

[1] S. John vi. 15.

their design, fled from them into a mountain, unknown to them, so that they could not then find Him. Our Lord, therefore, did not will to receive the honours of the world. And see how truly and unfeignedly He avoids them; for He sent away His disciples across the sea, and Himself ascended up into the mountain, so that if they sought Him any further amongst His disciples, they might not find Him. His disciples, however, were unwilling to be separated from Him, but He constrained them to enter into the ship, and to cross the sea. Their desire, indeed, was good, to wish to be always with their Lord; but He had disposed differently. See, then, with regard to them, how reluctantly they depart from Him, and how the Lord Jesus forces them, signifying to them that it was His wish that they should go into the ship without Him; upon which they humbly obeyed, however trying and hard it may seem to them. Thus daily does the Lord deal with us. For we would have Him never depart from us, but His pleasure is otherwise; He goes and returns as He wills, but ever with a view to our profit. Therefore I should like you to hear what S. Bernard says on this conflict. He speaks thus: "When the Spouse has been sought for with watchings and supplications, and with a copious shower of tears, suddenly, whilst He seems to be ours, He escapes; and then again presenting Himself to us as we weep for and pursue Him, He suffers Himself to be taken; but not to be detained even for a short space of time, for suddenly again, whilst we think to hold Him, He eludes our grasp; but if the devout soul persist in prayers and tears, He will again return, and will not deny her the request of her lips.[1] Yet soon again He will disappear, and be no longer seen, unless He is sought again with the whole desire of the heart. Thus, then, in this present life there may be frequent joy at the presence of the

[1] Ps. xxi. 2.

Spouse, yet not fulness of joy; because, though His visitations bring delight, yet the interchange of presence and absence gives pain. And such vicissitudes the beloved soul must suffer, until once for all, delivered from the burden of the flesh, it makes its escape, and soars aloft on the wings of its desires, truly ranging over the plains of contemplation, and following with unimpeded mind the Spouse whithersoever He goeth. Nor yet even to every soul which has passed beyond this present scene will He so reveal Himself, but only to those who have by great devotion, vehement longing, and sweet affection proved themselves His true spouses, and worthy of receiving the approach and visitation of the Word when clothed in glorious apparel, and with the beauty of the Bridegroom."[1] Again the same Saint says: "Perhaps Jesus thus withdraws Himself, that He might be the more abundantly sought after, and held more firmly. For at one time 'He made as though He would have gone further;'[2] not that He so willed, but He wished to hear, 'Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent.'" And a little afterwards he adds: "This same pious feint, or rather, salutary dispensation, which the Word in the Body sometimes expressed to the body, He does not cease to exercise by His Spirit in a special manner in devout souls now. Passing by, He wills to be invited to stop; going away, He wishes to be recalled. To go, indeed, is a dispensation of Providence: to return is ever the desire of His will; but both are full of wisdom, and wrought for purposes known to Himself. It is, then, manifest, that the soul is tried by these vicissitudes of the going away and coming back of the Word, as He Himself says, 'I go away, and come again unto you,' and 'a little while and ye shall not see Me, and again a little while and ye shall see Me.'[3]

[1] Serm. 32 in Cant. [2] S. Luke xxiv. 28.
[3] S. John xvi. 16.

Oh, a little while, yet not a little while! Oh, a little while, and yet a long while, dear Lord! A little while, Thou callest it, and we shall not see Thee. With all reverence for the word of the Lord, it is a long while, and much too long a while; yet both are true: it is a little while viewed as to our deserts, a long while viewed in reference to our desires. You find both mentioned in the Prophet: 'Though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.'[1] How can it both tarry, and not tarry; except that the coming will be expeditious if our deserts, and slow if our desires, are considered? The soul, indeed, borne forward by its longings, and drawn by its desires, overlooks its merits, closes its eyes to His Majesty, opens them to the joy of seeing Him, trusting in His salvation, and confiding in Him entirely. Fearless at last, and unbashful, the soul recalls the Word, and trustingly invites His embraces, calling Him with wonted freedom, not 'Lord,' but 'Beloved,' saying, 'Return, my beloved.'"[2] Again elsewhere he says, "These alternations cease not in those who are spiritual, or in those rather whom He intends to make spiritual, 'visiting them every morning, and trying them every moment.'"[3] Thus far S. Bernard.

You see, then, how the Lord Jesus spiritually visits the soul, and then leaves it, and what the soul at such times ought to do. It is her duty earnestly and persistently to recall Him, and in the meanwhile patiently to bear His absence, and after the example of the disciples, who obeyed Him by going into the ship without Him, to meet the storm, and to expect deliverance through His help. But let us now return to our Lord Jesus. As soon as the disciples had entered into the ship, and put out to sea, He went up into a mountain alone, and so escaped from the hands of those who sought Him. You see with what care

[1] Hab. ii. 3. [2] Serm. 74 in Cant. [3] Serm. 17 in Cant.

and eagerness He fled from and declined the honour of a crown. He gave us an example, that we should do as He has done. For not for His own sake, but for ours, He fled. He knew, indeed, how rash we are apt to become, if we aspire to earthly honours. For honours are amongst the greatest snares that can entangle a soul, and among the greatest burdens for its overthrow which I know, whether it be the honour of prelacy or of secular power, or of learning. For it is almost impossible for men who delight in honours not to be in danger, as one who stands on the brink of a precipice, or rather, which is worse, is already dashed down a precipice; and this for many reasons which I will show you. First, because the mind inordinately delights in them, and is only concerned in preserving and increasing them. And, "in proportion as any one delights in lower things," says S. Gregory,[1] "is he alienated from Supernal Love." Secondly, because such an one is bent on procuring friends, followers, and confederates, through whose instrumentality and co-operation honour is maintained or heightened; and consequently many things are done which are in conflict with God and conscience, with a view to gratifying such friends, to induce them to lend him their support. In the third place, because he is jealous of those who have honours, and disparages them, that so he may advance himself, and thus he falls into hatred and envy. Fourthly, because he deems himself, and would be deemed by others, worthy of honour, and thus he falls into vanity and pride. But, according to the Apostle, "If any man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself."[2] And therefore the Lord says in the Gospel, "When ye have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants."[3] But

[1] S. Greg. Hom. xxx. in Evang.

[2] Gal. vi. 3.

[3] S. Luke xvii. 10.

when does one desirous of honour say this? Fifthly, because he does not walk according to the Spirit, but according to the flesh, for his mind is not concentrated, neither is it elevated to heavenly things, but is distracted, and dissipated upon a variety of objects. Sixthly and lastly, because as soon as he begins to delight in honours, he becomes so allured by them, that he cannot be satisfied, and daily seeks new and greater honours, and the more he gets the more he thirsts for; for he ever persuades himself that he is honourable and worthy in some unusual degree, both in his own eyes and in the eyes of others; and thus he falls into ambition, which is the worst vice, and the root and cause of many others. Hear what S. Bernard says of its malignity, and not only what I say. "Ambition," says he, "is a subtle evil, and hidden poison, a secret pestilence, the author of deceit, the mother of hypocrisy, the parent of malice, a source of vices, the fuel of crimes, the rust of virtues, the moth of sanctity, the blinder of hearts, creating diseases out of remedies, engendering sickness out of medicine. How many has this pestilence wickedly supplanted, and also basely overthrown; so that others, who had not detected this occult sapper of the foundations, have been suddenly terrified at the sight of their ruin. But what nourishes this worm, so much as distraction of mind and forgetfulness of the Truth. For what but Truth can throw light on the subtleties of this traitor, and discover this work of darkness? Is it not the Truth which says, 'What is a man profited, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?'[1] And again: "'Mighty men shall be mightily tormented.'[2] Thus does the Truth bring as a solemn suggestion to our minds, how frivolous is the consolation of ambition, how heavy its judgment, how short its gain, how obscure its end. You will remark that the third temptation of the Lord was

[1] S. Matt. xvi. 26. [2] Wisd. vi. 6.

to ambition, when all the kingdoms of the world were offered, if He would fall down and worship the tempter. You see the path to ambition is the adoration of the devil, and that the honours of the world and the glory thereof are attained on the condition that he is worshipped."[1] Elsewhere S. Bernard says, "We are eager to rise, and all desire exaltation; for we are noble creatures, and have a certain greatness of spirit, and therefore we naturally aspire to exaltation. But woe to us, if we wish to follow him who says, 'I will sit upon the mount of the covenant, on the sides of the North.'[2] O wretch, on the sides of the North! cold is that mountain: we will not follow thee; thou hast the lust of power, and wouldst presume to take the highest dignity. Yet how many, even to this very day, do follow thy foul and miserable steps; or rather, how few are there who escape the thraldom of this common vice of ambition. Whom, then, are you following, wretched man? Whom are you following? Is not this the mount which, when the angel ascended, he became the devil? And are you not aware, that after his fall, tortured by envy, and wickedly anxious to supplant mankind, he pointed out to them another mountain like unto it, and said, 'Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil'?"[3] And a little after S. Bernard adds, "This ambition after power robbed the angel of angelic happiness; so the desire of knowledge stripped man of the glory of immortality. Let any one try to climb the steep of power, what opponents he will have to encounter, what foes to repel him, what obstacles, how hard a road! But what if he should succeed in gaining his object? 'Mighty men,' says Scripture, 'shall be mightily tormented,'[4] and therefore I need not point out what present cares and anxieties the possession of power brings with it.

[1] Serm. 6, super Ps. xci. [2] Is. xiv. 13.
[3] Gen. iii. 5. Serm. 4, de Asc. Dom. [4] Wisd. vi. 5.

Another man is ambitious of the knowledge which puffeth up; how he labours for it, what anxiety of mind he suffers; and yet after all he shall hear, 'Though thou burst thyself, thou shalt not attain it.' His eye shall rest in bitterness on any one whom he may see, or whom he may imagine others think, superior to himself. What if he swells himself with conceit? 'I will destroy,' saith the Lord, 'the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.'[1] Without dwelling longer on this subject, you have seen, I think, how we must avoid both mountains, if we tremble at the perdition of the angels, or the fall of man. 'Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew, neither let there be rain upon you.'[2]

"But what shall we do? We must not thus ascend, and yet we are possessed with the desire to rise; who then shall teach us a wholesome way of ascent? Who but He of whom we read, 'He that descended, is the same also that ascended'?[3] By Him the right path of ascension has been marked out, so that we might not follow the footsteps or counsel of that wicked leader and seducer. And because there was no one who could ascend, He, the Most High, descended, and by His descent consecrated for us a sweet and salutary ascent. He descended from the height of power, when He clothed Himself with the weakness of our flesh; He descended from the summit of knowledge, when 'it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.'[4] For what can seem more weak than the little tender body and limbs of an infant? What more void of knowledge than a babe, who knows only the mother's breasts? Who is more powerless than He whose limbs are all nailed to the cross, whose bones may all be counted? Who more foolish than He, 'who poured out His soul unto

[1] Is. xxix. 14; 1 Cor. i. 19; Obad. 8.
[2] 2 Sam. i. 21.
[3] Eph. iv. 10.
[4] 1 Cor. i. 21.

death, and paid the things that He never took'?[1] Do you see, then, how He who so deeply descended, emptied Himself of His power and of His wisdom? But He could not ascend higher into the mount of goodness, nor more forcibly commend His charity. Nor is it a wonder that Christ by descending ascended, when both the others by ascending fell."[2] In another place S. Bernard says, "Therefore, my dearly beloved, persevere in the discipline which you have received, that by humility you may ascend to sublimity; because this is the way, and there is no other beside it. He who tries any other road falls rather than ascends; for it is humility alone which ascends, and which exalts, and this only it is which leads to life." And again, "O perversity, O ambition of the sons of Adam! Because when it is most difficult to ascend, but most easy to descend, they ascend with care, and descend with much difficulty, being ever ready for honours, for the highest posts, it may be, ecclesiastical dignities—formidable even for the shoulders of angels to bear. But to follow Thee, Lord Jesus, scarcely any one is found, any one who will suffer himself to be drawn, or desires to be led along the way of Thy commandments."[3] Thus far S. Bernard. From what has been said, it is manifest how you may attain to true honour, namely, by humility, and how the transient and false honour of the world is to be avoided. But, perhaps, some who are ambitious of knowledge and honour, flatter themselves by the specious pretext of gain to souls, as if they would become thereby more capable of promoting the salvation of others. But hear how S. Bernard answers them: "Would that any one who thus enters upon some charge, if it might be so, might as faithfully fulfil it as he confidently thrusts himself into it. But it is difficult, nay, perhaps impossible, that from the bitter root of ambition should spring the

[1] Ps. lxix. 5. [2] Serm. 4 in Asc. Dom. [3] Ibid.

sweet fruit of love."[1] Thus far S. Bernard. But to arrive at this pitch of contempt for honours, you need to have attained a very high degree of virtue. For, as S. Chrysostom says, "To use honours well is as difficult, as to be in the company of some beautiful young creature, and to obey the law of never looking upon her." And therefore it is undoubtedly the case, that there is need of a very strong determination for one who possesses power or honour, if he would use it aright.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

How our Lord prayed upon the Mountain, and, having come down from it, walked on the Water; and many Observations about Prayer.

As you have already heard, the Lord Jesus, having constrained His disciples to enter into the ship, Himself went up into a mountain.[2] Let us finish the account, then, of what our Lord did after the miracle of the loaves, because the history is continuous, and the events which are contained in this meditation occurred at the same time. I have, however, divided them, that they may be the better understood, and that their moral teaching may be the more clearly explained. After, then, the disciples had entered into the ship, Christ Himself went up into the mountain, and there He continued in prayer till the fourth watch of the night; that is, until three-quarters of the night had passed, and the fourth only remained. Whence you see how long

[1] Serm. ad Cleric.

[2] S. Mark vi. 45; S. John vi. 15; S. Matt. xiv. 22.

our Lord continued in prayer through the night, and it is often recorded that He thus gave Himself to prayer. Behold Him, then, how He prays and humbles Himself before the Father. He searches out solitary places, and goes alone to them; He afflicts Himself, and keeps long watches. The faithful Shepherd intercedes for His sheep; for He prays not for Himself, but for us, as our Advocate and Mediator with the Father. He prays, also, to give us an example of prayer. He frequently admonished His disciples about this, and in deeds confirmed His teaching. For He said to them, "that men ought always to pray, and not to faint."[1] And how importunity in prayer obtains what is asked, He illustrates by the example of the judge and widow, as you find in S. Luke. He exhorted them, when they prayed, to have confidence that they would obtain what they asked, saying, "Ask, and it shall be given to you," proposing to them another example in the friend who sent the loaves to his friend, on account of the importunity with which he begged for them, as you will also find in S. Luke.[2] And this He said, to commend to us the virtue of prayer. It is, indeed, an inestimable virtue, and has power to obtain all that is good for us, and to remove all that is hurtful. If you would patiently bear adversity, be a man of prayer. If you would overcome temptations and trials, be a man of prayer. If you would tread underfoot corrupt affections, be a man of prayer. If you would detect the snares of Satan and avoid them, be a man of prayer. If you would live cheerfully in the work of God, and tread onward in the path of labour and affliction, be a man of prayer. If you would give yourself to a spiritual life, and not be occupied with the desires of the flesh, be a man of prayer. If you would put to flight the swarms of vain thoughts, be a man of prayer. If you would enrich your soul with holy and good thoughts,

[1] S. Luke xviii. 1. [2] S. Luke xi. 5.

with desires, fervent aspirations, and devotions, be a man of prayer. If you would stablish your heart with a courageous spirit and with a firm resolve to please God, be a man of prayer. In short, would you root out vices, and be filled with virtues, be a man of prayer. For therein is received the unction of the Holy Spirit, which teaches the soul all things. Would you mount even to contemplation, and enjoy the embraces of the Spouse, be a man of prayer. For to that degree of contemplation and taste of heavenly things prayer alone can conduct us. You see, then, how great is the power and virtue of prayer. In confirmation of what I have said, without adducing the many testimonies of Scripture, it will serve for a convincing proof, the fact that we daily hear and see persons illiterate and simple who have obtained those blessings of which we have spoken, and many more, by the virtue of prayer. Those all ought to lead lives of prayer who desire to imitate Christ, and particularly religious persons, who should have more leisure for this purpose. Wherefore I exhort you, and, had I the power, would mostly enjoin upon you, that you should make prayer the principal business of your life, of course after the proper duties of your state have been discharged. Let prayer be your chief delight; for nothing else ought to delight you so much as to dwell with your Lord, which you do through prayer. But that you may enjoy the benefit of a better counsellor, hear the honeyed words which flow from S. Bernard on that subject. For he says, "Those who are in the habit of frequent prayer, know experimentally what I say. Oftentimes we approach the altar with lukewarm and dry hearts; we apply ourselves to prayer, and persevering therein, presently grace is infused, our affections are nourished with richness, a very inundation of devotion pervades our whole being, as if the breasts were distended with such a sweetness, that it could not but overflow to all

around."[1] Again, at the beginning of Lent, S. Bernard says, "As often as I treat of prayer, certain words of human thoughts I seem to hear in my heart. For how is it that, though we never cease from prayer, we seem hardly ever, any of us, to experience the fruits of prayer? As we go to prayer, so we seem to return from it; and no one answers us a word, no one grants us anything. But follow the judgment of faith, and not of feeling. Faith is true: but feeling, fallacious. What, then, is the truth of faith, but what the Son of God promised, saying, 'What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them'?[2] Let none of you, brethren, think lightly of prayer; for I say unto you, that He to whom we pray does not so regard it. Before it has gone forth from our mouth, He orders it to be inscribed above. And one of two things we can unhesitatingly hope for, that either He will grant what we ask, or what He knows will be more useful to us. For we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but He has pity on our ignorance, and graciously receiving our prayer, does not grant that which would by no means be profitable for us, or at least would not be so at present. However, our prayer can never be fruitless, if we only do what the Psalmist bids us: 'Delight thou in the Lord, and He shall give thee thy heart's desire.'"[3] And a little afterwards, "But consider, that He calls that 'the desires of the heart' which the judgment of reason approves. Nor have you cause to complain, but rather every reason to give thanks with your whole heart, that so great is the care of your God for you, that so often as you ask what is unprofitable to you, He does not grant it, but puts in its stead some better gift. As an earthly father readily gives a child bread when he asks for it; but if he asks for a knife which the father thinks he had better not have, he does not give it

[1] Serm. 9 in Cant. [2] S. Mark xi. 24. [3] Ps. xxxvii. 4.

him, but breaks the bread himself. Admit, then, that the desires of the heart may be summed up in these three kinds, nor can I see what else there is which the child of God ought to seek. Two, indeed, concern this present life, namely, the goods of the body, and the goods of the soul; the third, is the blessedness of eternal life. Do not marvel that I affirm that the goods of the body are to be sought from God; since bodily goods are as much His as goods of the soul. And, therefore, we should seek and expect to obtain from Him whatever is needful to sustain us in His service. Nevertheless, the necessities of the soul must be more frequently and more fervently prayed for; that is, for obtaining the grace of God and the virtues of the soul. Thus, too, we must pray most earnestly and with all our hearts for eternal life, when our blessedness will be full and perfect, both of body and soul." And again, "Let the prayer which is offered for temporal things be confined to what is necessary only. Let the prayer which is for the virtues of the soul be free from all impurity of aim, and intent upon the will of God alone. Let that which is for eternal life be offered with all humility, leaning only on the mercy of God."[1] Again, "He who would pray aright, must observe not only the place but the time. Holy seasons are certainly the most fitting; and especially when the profound stillness of night reigns around, then plainly prayer can be breathed forth most free and pure. 'Arise,' says Jeremiah, 'cry out in the night; in the beginning of the watches; pour out thine heart like water before the face of the Lord.'[2] How securely in the night prayer ascends, God alone beholding, and the Holy Angel who waits to present it at the heavenly altar! How grateful it is and bright—tinted, as it were, with the hue of bashful modesty! How quiet and calm is it, disturbed by no noise or sound! In

[1] Serm. 5 in Quad. [2] Lam. ii. 19.

short, how pure and untainted, sullied by no dust of worldly anxiety, tried by no glance of praise or breath of flattery! Therefore was it that the spouse withdrew to her secret chamber, and at night, bashfully and prudently, to pray; that is, to seek the Word, for it is one and the same thing. Otherwise, you would not pray aright, if in prayer you sought anything besides the Word, or if you sought it not on His account; for all things are in Him. In Him are the remedies of our wounds; in Him, supplies for our necessities; in Him, the repairs of our defects; in Him, abundance for our progress; in Him, in a word, all find whatever is needful for them to have, whatever is becoming or fit. It is needless, then, to seek for anything apart from the Word, since He is all. For even these temporal things which at times we seem so familiarly to ask when there is necessity, if we ask them, as indeed is right, for the sake of the Word, we seek not so much them as the Word, on account of Whom we ask them."[1] Thus far S. Bernard. Now you have heard the most beautiful words of S. Bernard, in his highest flights of contemplation, tasting, according to his gift, the sweetness of prayer. Reflect on what he says, that you, too, may taste something of that sweetness; for it is for this purpose I gladly in this little Work insert his words from time to time, because they are not only spiritual and affective, but also full of beauty, and excite us powerfully to the service of God. For he was, indeed, most eloquent, and full of the spirit of wisdom, and eminent in sanctity. May you be drawn to imitate him, and put into practice his advice and sayings, for this is my reason for so often setting him before you.

But let us return to the Lord Jesus. While, then, our Lord was praying on the mountain, the disciples were in great distress and dismay upon the sea; for the wind was

[1] Serm. 86 in Cant.

contrary to them, and the ship was tossed by the winds and waves. Behold them, then, with pity, for they are in much anxiety and distress. For the tempest raged against them, and it was night, and they were without their Lord. But in the fourth watch of the night, the Lord came down from the mountain and came near to them, walking on the sea. Behold Him, then, here as your God, and see how, wearied with long watching and long prayer, He comes down the steep and, it may be, rugged mountain, perhaps barefoot, and how He walks upon the sea with firm step as on land. Thus the creature seemed to recognize the Creator. But when He drew near to the ship, the disciples were afraid and cried out, thinking Him to be a spectre; but the gracious Lord, unwilling that they should be any longer terrified, reassured them, saying, "It is I; be not afraid."[1] Then Peter, confident in the power of the Lord, and at His bidding, began himself to walk on the sea; but tottering, he soon began to sink, when the Right Hand of the Lord upheld him, and kept him from sinking. On this passage the old commentary says, "The Lord bade him walk upon the sea, that he might manifest His Divine power; He permitted him to sink, lest he should be unmindful of his own weakness, lest he should feel himself to be equal with God and become proud." But upon the Lord entering the ship the storm ceased, and all became calm. And the disciples reverently received Him, and rejoiced greatly, and remained in perfect tranquillity. Behold Him, then, attentively, and the disciples also, in the circumstances which I have related, for they are beautiful, and afford matter for devout meditation. From this deed, then, you may draw the moral consideration that our Lord acts thus with us daily in a spiritual manner; He suffers and permits His elect to be afflicted in this world, both inwardly and outwardly, for He

[1] S. Matt. xvi. 27.

"scourgeth every son whom He receiveth."[1] For those who are without discipline are not sons, as the Apostle says, but bastards. It is, indeed, good for us to undergo trial and affliction here, for we are thereby taught, and gain virtues, and preserve those we have already acquired, and, what is more, we lay up future and eternal rewards thereby. And, therefore, we ought not to be broken in spirit by tribulations, or become impatient, but rather to love and value them. But because the great use of afflictions is unknown to many, they deem them, therefore, hard and insupportable. That you, however, may be well instructed on this matter, and may bear them patiently, I, as usual, bring forward the words of S. Bernard as an authority. He says, "Tribulation is useful, for it works out our probation, and leads to glory. 'I am with him,' says the Psalmist, 'in trouble,'[2] etc. Let us, then, give thanks to the Father of mercies, Who is with us in trouble, and 'comforteth us in all our tribulation.'[3] For, I have said, tribulation is a necessary thing, and is converted into glory and changed into joy—joy, indeed, long, which no one may take from us, a great joy, a full joy. Tribulation is necessary, and it is a necessity which brings us our crown. Let us not, then, despise it, brethren; the seed is small, but great are the fruits which spring from it. Perhaps it is tasteless, perhaps bitter; perhaps it is like a grain of mustard seed. We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen in it. For the things which are seen are temporal, the things which are not seen are eternal."[4] And again, "'I am with him in trouble,'[5] saith the Lord, and I will seek for no other merit than tribulation. 'It is good for me to hold me fast by God.' But not only so, but also 'to put my trust in the Lord God,'[6] for 'I will deliver him

[1] Heb. xii. 6. [2] Ps. xci. 15. [3] 2 Cor. i. 4.
[4] Serm. xvii., Qui habitat. [5] Ps. xci. 15. [6] Ps. lxxiii. 27.

and bring him to honour; yea, I am with him in trouble.'[1] 'My delights,' he says, 'are with the sons of men.'[2] He came down to earth, that He might be nigh unto those who are of a contrite heart, that He might be with us in our tribulation. But there shall be a time when we shall be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord, provided that, however, we are in the meanwhile careful to have Him with us now. It is good for me, O Lord, to be in trouble, if only Thou Thyself art with me; rather than to reign without Thee, to feast without Thee, to glory without Thee. 'The furnace proveth the potter's vessels, and tribulation tries the just.' Why do we fear? Why do we hesitate? Why do we shrink from this furnace? Does the fire rage?—but the Lord is with us in tribulation. If God be with us, who can be against us? If He wills to deliver us, who is there who shall take us out of His hand? Lastly, if He glorify us, who shall humble us?" Again S. Bernard says, "Not only, then, in hope, but in tribulation we glory. 'Most gladly, therefore,' says S. Paul, 'will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.'[3] That infirmity is to be desired which is compensated by the power of Christ, Who will grant me not only to be weak, but to faint and fail as far as myself is concerned, so that I may be strengthened by the power of the Lord of Hosts. For His 'strength is made perfect in weakness.' Lastly, he says, 'When I am weak, then am I strong.'"[4] Again the same writer says,[5] "It is on this account that the Spouse in the Canticles calls the Beloved not a bundle, but a *little* bundle,[6] because she regards as light everything which is done or suffered for love of Him. Truly, a little bundle; for unto us a Little Child[7] is born. Truly, a little bundle; for 'the

[1] Ps. xci. 15. [2] Prov. viii. 31. [3] 2 Cor. xii. 9.
[4] Serm. xxv. in Cant. [5] Serm. xliii. in Cant. [6] "Fasciculus." V.
[7] "Parvulus." Is. ix. 6. V.

sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For our light affliction,' he says, 'which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.'[1] That, then, shall one day be to us a huge pile of glory, which is now but a little bundle of myrrh. Is not that a little bundle, of which it is said the 'yoke is easy and burden light'? Not, remember, that it is light in itself, for the bitterness of death is no light trial, but a severe one; but it is light to him who loves."[2] Again, S. Bernard says on the words, "For the arrow that flieth by day," "If we are minded to look at the whole body of the Church, we may easily observe that spiritual men are far more fiercely attacked than carnal. This truly is the work of proud and envious malice, which always assails more violently the most perfect, according to these words, 'His meat is choice.'[3] Nay, it is, in a certain way, a dispensation of Divine Providence, that the imperfect should not be tempted above that they are able to bear, but with the temptation have a way to escape; and that the perfect should achieve not only more glorious, but more numerous triumphs over the enemy." And a little further on he says, "With far greater anxiety and redoubled cunning does the enemy strive to wound us on the right side than on the left, for it is not so much the substance of the body as the life of the soul which he labours to undermine." And again, below this, he adds, "We must direct all our resistance to those points where the pressure is most urgent, where the whole weight of the war hangs heaviest, where the entire issue of the struggle depends. Here must be decided the question, whether we shall be conquered and reduced to an ignominious slavery, or conquer and be crowned with glory and triumph." And again, "This is the favour and mercy of God towards His

[1] 2 Cor. iv. 17. [2] Serm. 43 in Cant. [3] Hab. i. 16. V.

servants, and His regard for His elect, that whilst He feigns for a while to be unmindful of their left wing, He always stands by and protects the right. Hence it is the prophet's testimony, 'I have set God always before me; for He is on my right hand, therefore I shall not fall.'"[1] And again S. Bernard says, "Would that Thou wert always on my right hand, good Jesus; and that Thou didst always hold me by it. For I know and am certain that no adversity shall hurt me, if no iniquity reigns over me. Let me be cut and beaten on my left, attacked with violence, covered with reproach, I will willingly endure it; if only during it I am upheld by Thee, and Thou Thyself art my defence upon my right hand."[2] Again, "It is one thing to be prompted by virtue, another to be governed by reason; it is one thing to be ruled by virtue, another to be delighted with sweetness. For though wisdom is powerful, and virtue sweet, yet—to use words rightly—power characterizes virtue, and calmness of mind, accompanied with a certain spiritual sweetness, appertains to wisdom. This, I believe, the Apostle meant, when, after much exhortation respecting virtue, he added, that wisdom consists in sweetness in the Holy Ghost.[3] To resist, therefore, to meet violence by counter violence, is that which belongs especially to virtue, is an honour, but it is also a toil. For it is not the same thing to defend your honour with labour, and to possess it in peace. It is one thing to be actuated by virtue, another to enjoy the practice of it. Whatever virtue acquires by labour, wisdom enjoys; and what wisdom enjoins and settles, virtue manages and brings to pass. 'The wisdom of a learned man cometh by opportunity of leisure,'[4] says the Wise Man; the leisure, therefore, of wisdom promotes business, and the more there is of leisure, the more opportunity there is for business in

[1] Ps. xvi. 9.
[2] Serm. 7 in Ps., Qui habitat.
[3] 2 Cor. vi. 6. V.
[4] Ecclus. xxxviii. 24.

its proper sphere. On the other hand, virtue shines with a greater lustre the more it is exercised, and the proof of its excellence lies in the amount of toil it can undergo. And if any one should define wisdom to be the love of virtue, I do not think that he would be far off the mark. But where love is, labour is not, but sweetness. And perhaps the word for wisdom in Latin is derived from a word which signifies a relish,[1] implying, as a kind of quality or accidental accompaniment of virtue, a sort of sweetness which is imported into that which otherwise would be insipid or bitter. Neither should I quarrel with any one who defined wisdom a taste for good." And further on the same writer proceeds, "Therefore it is the part of virtue to bear trials bravely; of wisdom, to find a joy in them. To wait on the Lord[2] and be of a good courage, belongs to virtue; to taste and see how gracious the Lord is,[3] appertains to wisdom. And that both may be the better known by the types of character which are produced by them; modesty of mind is a proof of wisdom; constancy marks the man of virtue. And well is it that wisdom should come after virtue, for virtue is as it were a firm foundation, upon which wisdom builds for herself a house."[4]

Again, "Happy is the man who accepts the sufferings of his body for righteousness' sake, and is willing to suffer all for the Son of God; without repining in his heart, and with thanksgiving and praise upon his lips. He who thus exults, is the one who takes up his bed and goes into his house. Our bed is our body, in which before we lay languishing, serving our desires and lusts. We carry it, when we make it obey the spirit." Again, "Truly manifold is the Spirit, who in such manifold ways inspires the sons of men,

[1] *i.e.* "Sapientia," from "sapor."

[2] Ps. xxvii. 16.

[3] Ps. xxiv. 8.

[4] S. Bernard, Serm. de Passione Dom. in Fer., 4 Hebd. Sanc.

that there is no one that is hidden from the heat thereof. He is given to them for use, for miracles, for salvation, for help, for solace, for fervour. For the use of life, indeed, He gives both to good and bad, to unworthy and worthy alike, all benefits abundantly, so that He hardly seems to observe any rule of discrimination. He would be ungrateful, who did not recognize in these things the benefits of the Spirit. As to miracles, in signs, wonders, and various mighty works which were wrought by the hands of some, He was present. It was He who worked so many miracles in days of old, and who fortifies our faith in the present by memories of the past. But because to some even this is bestowed without avail to themselves, He in the third place infuses the grace of salvation, the effect of which is, that we turn with all our heart to the Lord our God. Further, the Spirit is given for help, when He 'helpeth our infirmities' in all our struggles. And when the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, *that* inspiration is for consolation. He is also given for fervour, when in the hearts of the perfect, breathing with more of vehemency, He enkindles a strong flame of charity, so that we not only rejoice in the hope of the glory of the sons of God, but also in tribulations, deeming reproach glory, disgrace joy, contempt exultation. To all of us, lest I am deceived, the Spirit is given for salvation; but not to all for fervour. For there are but few who are filled with this Spirit, few who strive earnestly to attain spiritual excellence. We are content with our narrowness, neither do we aspire to liberty, nor ever, perhaps, desire it."[1]

Thus you have seen, then, with how many and beautiful reasons, and with what surpassing eloquence, S. Bernard proves to us the advantage of trials. Do not marvel, then, if the Lord permits His own disciples, whom He so greatly

[1] Serm. 3 in Pent.

loved, to be tossed with tempests, seeing the advantage which they would gain thereby. For several times it is related that their boat was violently beaten by waves and contrary winds, but it was never overwhelmed by them. Learn, then, to turn to account these lessons, and so to establish and direct your heart, that in all adverse events, and oppositions of whatever kind, you may bear yourself patiently and joyfully, and so diligently walk in the path of the Spirit, that, being filled with fervour, you may even desire tribulation for the love of the Lord Jesus, who in His own case, and that of His disciples, has held and pointed out this exalted way.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

Concerning the Healing of the Daughter of the Canaanite, and how the Angels faithfully minister to us.

When the Lord Jesus was in the midst of His labours, preaching and healing the sick, there came to Him a woman of Canaan,[1] that is, of the land of Canaan, who was of the race of the Gentiles and not of the Jews, praying Him to deliver her daughter, who was vexed with a devil. For she had faith in Him, that He could do this. And though our Lord made no answer, she still urged her request, and persevered in crying after Him, and seeking from Him this act of mercy, so that the disciples joined their entreaty with hers. And when the Lord answered, that it was not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to dogs, she, humbling herself, replied, that at least, like

[1] S. Matt. xv. 22.

the dogs, she might eat of the crumbs, and thus she was thought worthy to be heard.

Behold here our Lord and His disciples at this occurrence, and refer to the general method of meditation which has been already suggested. However, consider the three chief virtues which this woman manifested, and bring the whole matter to bear on your own spiritual life. The first was her great faith, which even extended itself to her daughter, and for which she was especially commended by our Lord. The second was her perseverance in prayer, which was not only persevering but also importunate. And this importunity was acceptable to our Lord, and called forth by Him, as I have clearly shown in a former chapter. The third was her deep lowliness, for she declined not to be likened to a dog, nor deemed herself worthy to be reckoned among the children, or to receive a piece of bread, but was content to have crumbs only. Wherefore she greatly humbled herself, and thus what she asked for she obtained. In the same way you may most surely believe, if, with a sincere, faithful, and pure heart, with persevering prayer, you humble yourself before God, counting yourself unworthy of any good thing, that you also shall obtain whatever you ask. And as the Apostles prayed for the Canaanite, so, too, shall your angel be interested in your behalf, and bring your prayer before God. Upon which subject hear what S. Bernard has to say: "When my soul has been often sighing after God, yea, praying without ceasing, and consuming itself with desire, and the Beloved, after being so longed for, mercifully condescended to manifest Himself, I have thought that the words of Jeremiah might express my own experience, 'The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him.'[1] Nay, the very angel, one of the companions of the Spouse, to whom it

[1] Lam. iii. 25.

deputed the office of attending on and assisting at this secret and mutual salutation—this angel, I say, how does he with exultation and congratulatory joy turn to the Lord and say, 'I give Thee thanks, O Lord of Majesty, because Thou hast given him his heart's desire, and hast not denied him the request of his lips.'[1] He it is who in every place assiduously waits upon the soul, ever following it as a faithful attendant, and never ceasing to admonish it by continual suggestions; saying, 'Delight thou in the Lord, and He shall give thee thy heart's desire.'[2] And again, 'Wait for the Lord, and keep His way.' 'Though He tarry, wait for Him; because He will surely come, He will not tarry.'[3] But to our Lord he says, 'Like as the hart desireth the water-brooks, so longeth my soul after Thee, O God.'[4] My soul hath desired Thee in the night, and Thy Spirit is within the recesses of my heart. She hath sought Thee early. And again, all the day long hath she stretched forth her hands unto Thee. 'Send her away, for she crieth after Thee.'[5] Turn Thee a little, and be gracious. Look down from heaven, behold and visit thy desolate servant. The faithful friend of the bridegroom who is conscious, but without envy, of this mutual love, seeks not anything for self, but only the glory of the Lord. He passes, as it were, between the bridegroom and the bride, offering her vows, and bringing back gifts, calling out her love, and moving His pity. Sometimes also, although rarely, he seems to introduce them to each other, either attracting her, or inviting Him. For indeed he is a well-known attendant in the Heavenly Court, and fears not repulse, seeing that he daily beholds the Father's face."[6] Thus far S. Bernard.

You see how faithfully our angels wait upon us; and I

[1] Ps. xxi. 2. [2] Ps. xxxvii. 4. [3] Hab. ii. 3.
[4] Ps. xlii. 1. [5] S. Matt. xv. 23. [6] Serm. xxxi. in Cant.

take this opportunity of saying more on this subject. I wish you to know that we ought to have great reverence for them, and daily praise and honour them; and we are bound to render God thanks for their continual presence with us, and to keep ourselves from everything wrong or shameful, either in thought, word, or deed. Concerning this, S. Bernard admonishes us, when he says, on the ninety-first Psalm, "'He shall give His angels charge concerning thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.' How should this saying fill you with reverence, affect you with devotion, and impart to you confidence—reverence on account of their presence, devotion because of their benevolence, confidence from their guardianship. Walk circumspectly when angels are in your path, for they are bidden to have charge over thee in all thy ways. In every place of retirement, and in every corner of the street, be reverently conscious of the angel's presence. Dare not do in his presence what you would not dare to do in his sight." And again S. Bernard says, "The angels are not only with you, but for you. They are with you to protect you, they are with you to help you. What should you render unto the Lord, for all the benefits that He hath done unto you? For to Him alone be the honour and glory. Why to Him alone? Because it is He who so orders it, and from Whom is every perfect gift. Nevertheless, although it is He Who gives His angels charge over us, yet it is they who with such love obey His bidding, and succour us in all our necessities. Let us, therefore, cultivate a pious and grateful spirit towards our noble guardians; let us love and honour them as much as we can and as is fitting."[1] All we have said is in commendation of the service of the angels, their help, and the power of prayer. Keep these things in memory, and testify your reverence for the presence of the Holy Angels to the best of your power.

[1] Serm. xii. in Ps. xci.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

How some were offended at the Words of our Lord.

Marvel not if sometimes our words and actions should cause offence, though in themselves they are not in fault; since oftentimes this happened to our Lord Himself, who could not err. Thus when, on a certain occasion, the Pharisees asked our Lord why the disciples did not wash their hands before eating bread, our Lord severely answered them, blaming them for thinking more of exterior cleanness than of interior.[1] At which they were offended; but our Lord was not moved thereby. At another time, when He spake spiritual truths in the synagogue, some of His disciples took them in a carnal sense, not understanding them, and consequently withdrew themselves from Him. Whereupon, turning to the twelve disciples, he said, "Will ye also go away?" And Peter said for himself and for the rest, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."[2] Contemplate our Lord, then, on these occasions, and on similar ones, how He spake with power, and taught the truth, not paying account to the offence of the corrupt and foolish. It should, therefore, first be noted, that we ought not to shrink from that which is just and right, because what we say or do may be made a ground of offence. Secondly, that concerning inward purity we should be more careful than outward cleanliness, which our Lord more expressly teaches elsewhere in S. Luke,—how we should live in the spirit; so that the words of Christ should not seem strange to us, as they did to those disciples who,

[1] S. Matt. xv. 1; S. Mark vii. 1. [2] S. John vi. 66.

according to S. John, could not bear the saying, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man," etc., but went back. On the contrary, let us rather acknowledge them as the words of eternal life, that, together with the Twelve, we may perfectly imitate Him.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Concerning the Reward of those who forsake All.

When the faithful and prudent disciple Simon Peter questioned the Lord Jesus concerning the reward which himself and his companions would receive,[1] our Lord answered, amongst other things, that they who had forsaken all to follow Him, should receive an hundred-fold in this life, and in the world to come, eternal life. Mark well this reward, and rejoice greatly and give thanks and praise to the Lord with your whole heart, for that He hath called you to such an enterprise in which you can gain an hundred, as it were, for every pound, and beyond that, eternal life. But this hundred-fold is of spiritual goods, not material; namely, of interior consolations and virtues, which we know by our own experience, not by instruction. For when the soul delights in the perfume of poverty, the pure charm of chastity, of patience and other graces, and has a relish for them, does it not seem to you to receive an hundred-fold? And if we ascend higher, and know what it is to receive a visit from the Spouse, and to exult in His presence, do we not then gain a thousand-fold for all, whatever it may have been, and however disposed of, which had been renounced for Him? You see how true, then, is that which the Truth

[1] S. Matt. xix. 27.

speaks, and that He fails not to render a hundred-fold in this life, not only once but many times, to the soul which is devoted to Him; so that not only what has been actually forsaken, but even the whole world is counted as dung, by the soul which seeks to win the Spouse. But that you may be still more fully instructed concerning the hundred-fold, hear S. Bernard upon it: "If perchance some person of the world should say, 'Show me this hundredfold which you promise, and I will willingly give up all.' But what have I to show him? For faith hath no worth, when it rests only on the proof of human reason. Will you, then, believe a man showing, rather than the Truth promising? You err by trying to examine that which is too deep for scrutiny. 'Unless you believe, you will not understand.' The manna is hidden, which, in the Book of the Revelation of S. John, is promised to him that overcometh; a 'new name which no man knoweth but he who receives it.'"[1] Then, again, he continues, "Does he not possess all things, to whom all things work together for good? Hath he not the hundred-fold of all, who is filled with the Holy Spirit, who hath Christ in his heart? Hath he not much more than an hundred-fold, who hath the visitation of the Spirit, the Comforter, and the presence of Christ? O Lord, how great is the multitude of Thy sweetness which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee, and which Thou hast wrought for them that hope in Thee![2] See, how the holy soul breaks forth with the remembrance of the abundant sweetness, and labours to express it by multiplying words. 'How great,' he says, 'is the multitude!' This 'hundred-fold,' then, is the adoption of sons, the freedom and firstfruits of the spirit of a delicious charity, the glory of conscience, the kingdom of God which is within us. Not, indeed, meat and drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy

[1] Rev. ii. 17. [2] Ps. xxxi. 19.

Ghost.'[1] Joy, truly, not only in the hope of future glory, but also amid present trial. This is the fire which Christ willed that it should be vehemently kindled.[2] This is the virtue which made an Andrew embrace the cross, a Lawrence despise his executioners, a Stephen, at his death, pray for those who stoned him. This is that peace which Christ left to his own, when He gave it as His peace; for 'grace and mercy is to His saints'[3]—the peace, indeed, of the Father, and the pledge of future glory. This peace passeth all understanding; and whatever there is of pleasure under the sun, whatever to be desired in this world, can bear no comparison to it. This is the grace of devotion, and the unction which knoweth all things, which whoso experienceth, knoweth; and whoso hath not experienced, knoweth not: which none can know, except he hath received it." Thus far S. Bernard. Rejoice, then, and be glad, as I have said, and give thanks, in that you are called to receive this "hundred-fold," and often to enter this paradise, which you may make your own by living a life of prayer.

CHAPTER XL.

How the Lord sought from His Disciples what Men said concerning Him.

THE Lord Jesus, having come into the parts of Cæsarea Philippi, asked His disciples what was said of Himself; and also what they themselves thought Him to be, and about other things. And when they answered, some say this, and some that; then Peter for himself and the rest replied, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."[4]

[1] Rom. xiv. 17.
[2] S. Luke xii. 49.
[3] Wisd. iii. 9.
[4] S. Matt. xvi. 13.

Our Lord then said to him, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church," etc. And then He gave him, for themselves and their successors, the keys for binding and loosing upon earth. Contemplate him, then, and the other disciples according to the method which I have before suggested to you. And note, that this Peter whom our Lord had just so greatly magnified, a little after was called by Him "Satan,"[1] when, from a too natural love which he bore for Christ, he would have dissuaded Him from undergoing His Passion. And thus do you, after the example of your Lord, hold all for enemies, who, for the sake of avoiding bodily pain or discomfort, would turn you from the path of duty and the pursuit of spiritual good.

CHAPTER XLI.

Of the Transfiguration of our Lord on the Mount.

THE Lord Jesus, having taken with Him three of His disciples, ascended Mount Tabor, and was transfigured before them,[2] showing Himself to them in His glory. And there appeared Moses and Elias, and they spake of His future Passion. They said (may we imagine), "Lord, it doth not behove Thee to die, for one drop of Thy Blood would be enough to redeem the world." But the Lord Jesus answered, "The Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep, and so I ought to die."[3] The Holy Spirit, too, was present there, under the appearance of a bright cloud, and the Voice of the Father was heard in the cloud, saying, "This is My Beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased; hear Him."

[1] S. Matt. xvi. 23.
[2] S. Matt. xvii. 1; S. Mark ix. 2; S. Luke ix. 28.
[3] S. John x. 11.

Whereupon the disciples fell to the ground; and when they were aroused they saw no man, but Jesus only. Consider every point of this mystery, and place yourself in spirit on the Mount, and behold this glorious sight.

CHAPTER XLII.

How the Buyers and Sellers were cast out of the Temple.

Twice[1] did the Lord Jesus cast out the buyers and sellers from the Temple, an act which is reckoned among His great miracles. For although at other times they set Him at nought, yet then they all fled before Him. And notwithstanding they were many, they did not make a stand, but suffered Him alone, with a scourge of small cord, to drive them out. And this He was able to do, because there was a look of Divine greatness in His face which terrified them. For His zeal was vehemently kindled at seeing His Father so dishonoured by them, especially in the place where He should most be honoured, that He on both these occasions cast them out. Behold Him, then, attentively, and compassionate Him, for His heart was full of compassionate sorrow. And yet, at the same time, excite fear of Him. Here is an especial lesson for those who are employed in the Temple of God, and occupied with sacred things, lest they should involve themselves in worldly affairs, as these did, when they ought always to seek only the Divine glory. Such persons should still fear His rejection and indignation, and fear it to some purpose. If, then, you wish to escape this tormenting fear, be careful, if you are dedicated to the

[1] S. John ii. 13; S. Matt. xxi. 12.

especial service of God, not to entangle yourselves with the cares and business of the world. And do not occupy yourself with works which take up much time, and only minister to curiosity and worldliness.

CHAPTER XLIII.

Of the Pool of Bethesda, and what happened there. Also, against Rash Judgment.

THERE was in Jerusalem a certain pool,[1] in which the sheep, which were to be offered in sacrifice, were washed. There is a story that the wood of the Cross lay hid beneath its waters. Once every year this pool was stirred by an angel, and the sick man who first stepped into the troubled waters was made whole. Therefore many sick folk waited day by day, in hope of the moving of the water. Now there was there a certain sick man, lying on a bed, who had suffered from paralysis for thirty-eight years. This man the Lord Jesus healed on the Sabbath day. Contemplate the condescension of Christ, as He goes to the afflicted man, and converses with him as was His wont. In this action, notice three things. First, see how our Lord asked the sick man whether he wished to be healed. In the same way with us; He will not save us without our consent, and sinners are inexcusable who will not consent to the will of the Lord, and to be saved. For S. Augustine says, "He who created thee without thee, will not justify thee without thee."[2] Secondly, we ought to beware lest we fall away from our Lord; for if, after we are healed, we relapse into sin, we shall deserve to be treated with greater severity on account of

[1] S. John v. 1. [2] S. Aug. de Ver. Ap. xv.

our ingratitude, as our Lord said to this man, "Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee." Thirdly, consider that the wicked make everything an occasion of evil, whilst the good turn everything to good. For when this man, having recovered the use of his limbs, began to carry his bed, and the Jews said to him that it was not lawful to carry his bed on the Sabbath day, he replied, "He that made me whole, the same said to me, Take up thy bed and walk." They did not say, Who is he that made thee whole? They only laid hold of that which they could find fault with, and left out that which they might have praised. This is ever the way with carnal men, who interpret everything in a bad sense, and thus lose every opportunity of spiritual profit. But those who are spiritual refer everything to the praise of God, whether it be prosperous or adverse; and never question the good Providence of God, Who orders all things rightly, and permits all things justly, for they see all things in the best light; according to the teaching of S. Bernard, who says, "Beware of becoming a curious inquirer into the conduct of other men, or a rash judge of it. Even should you see him do a wrong act, do not judge your neighbour. But rather excuse the motive, if you cannot excuse the act; impute it to ignorance, unguardedness, or accident. But if the matter be so clearly wrong that you can give no other account of it, nevertheless bring yourself into the mind to say, 'It was from too strong a temptation. What would have happened to me, had I been exposed to the same?'"[1] Thus far S. Bernard. But that spiritually-minded persons make all things to turn to their profit, even their own and other's sins, and hurtful things, and even works of the Devil, S. Bernard thus teaches: "Though the irrational and animal life is not able to attain to spiritual things, yet by the bodily service which it renders it may greatly contribute towards

[1] Serm. xl. in Cant.

obtaining them, in the case of those who turn all temporal things to eternal profit by the use which they make of them,—using this world, as not abusing it."[1] And some way further on, the Saint says, "Though there are some animals which in their use are found troublesome and even hurtful, and destructive as to the life and property of man; yet have they their end, and can be made to work together for good to those who, according to His purpose, are called to be saints; and if they are of no use for food, or for work, they may be of service at least by calling into exercise their minds in ways of discipline, through Him who is ever at hand to help those who rightly employ their reason, by means of which the invisible things of God are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made.[2] For the Devil and his ministers, ever malignant in will, ever desirous of hurting; if we be but zealous followers of that which is good, will rather aid us than hurt us, and thus in spite of themselves work together for good to those who are good."

And again, "There are beings who make for good without willing it; there is the wicked man, there is the bad angel; and it is evident that the good which is wrought by them is not to their account, for good cannot be done against our own will. They are only the appointed means of good to others; and the good which we may gain through a wicked instrumentality is good only in so far forth as it reaches us. This is the reason why God, by the ministry of the evil, works good to the good; and it is not because He has any need of their agency."[3] Again, "Dust and ashes, why art thou proud? The Lord, even in the angels, abominates pride. Therefore let the rejection of angels be a lesson to man. For it is written for their punishment, 'that the evil of the Devil should work together with me for good, and

[1] Serm. v. super Cant. [2] Rom. i. 20. [3] Serm. liv. super Cant.

that I wash my hands in the blood of the ungodly.' How, askest thou? Hear. Certainly, on the pride of the Devil a horrible and terrible curse is hurled." And further on, S. Bernard says, "If such judgment befell an angel, what shall become of dust and ashes? He in heaven was proud; but I on a dunghill. Who does not find pride less bearable in a poor man than in one who is rich? Alas! if so severe was the penalty of one high and powerful, what shall happen to me, so low, so miserable, and yet so proud?" For S. Bernard,[1] speaking of the spouse, the Church, which, after many faults, came to the Lord, for she was composed of Gentiles, worshippers of idols—a fact which the Synagogue made a ground of reproach, but which she thus turned to account—"she," said he, "who was forgiven much, and who loved much, turned to her advantage the very scorn which her rival at the feast cast upon her; she became more meek on account of reprimand, more patient in labour, more ardent in love, more wise in caution, more humble in conscience, more acceptable for bashfulness, more ready to obedience, more devout and diligent in thanksgiving." Thus S. Bernard.

See, then, how spiritual men interpret everything in good part, and turn all to good account. Be, therefore, like them, and make a gain of all that happens. The consideration of this will strengthen you to bear trial and temptation with tranquillity of mind. For, by daily discipline, we can arrive at such a degree of mental repose, that hardly anything shall be able to disturb us, and the saying of the Wise Man shall be found true in your case, "Whatsoever shall happen to the just, it shall not sadden him."[2]

[1] Serm. xiv. super Cant. [2] Prov. xii. 21. V.

CHAPTER XLIV.

How the Disciples of Christ plucked the ears of Corn. Also of Poverty.

The disciples of the Lord Jesus, on a certain Sabbath day being hungry, and having no food at hand, passed through some fields in which there was corn, and, plucking the ears of wheat, rubbed them between their hands, and did eat.[1] But the Pharisees reproached them, saying, that it was not lawful to do this on the Sabbath. The Lord, however, defended them, and did Himself many things on the Sabbath day, as I have before said when treating of the man who had a withered hand. Behold, then, His disciples, and pity them, placed, as they were, in such a strait, although they did this act in a gleeful spirit from their love of poverty, which their Lord and Master had commanded in the first of the Beatitudes. What a spectacle is this! The princes of the world, in the presence of its Creator, reduced to such a degree of want, that they were obliged to take nourishment after the manner of the cattle, to sustain life! The Lord regarded them with a look of deep compassion, because He loved them most tenderly. And yet He rejoiced, both for their sakes when He thought of the question of their future reward, and on our account, because such a fair example was thus left to us. In this example, we may find a lesson from many virtues. Here, poverty shines forth brilliantly; here, the pomp of the world is openly despised; here, extravagance, luxury, gluttony, effeminacy, greed, are completely overthrown. Observe, then, this example, and

[1] S. Matt. xii. 1.

embrace the virtues it sets forth with your whole heart. In our Lord, in His mother, in His disciples, the princes of the world, in all who have striven to imitate them perfectly,—detachment from the things of time and sense has been a characteristic virtue.

But give attention to the kind of poverty of which I speak. There are those who separate themselves externally from all possessions, and bind themselves not to return to them. Give thanks for the grace which is given to you, and be faithful to Him that calleth you. But I go deeper than this: though the one rightly should involve the other, external poverty is of no value without internal. I speak of poverty of spirit, for virtues have their roots in the soul, not in outward actions. No outward observance of poverty is of avail without detachment of heart. For if you are empty externally only, and full within, and do not mortify your desires and sensual appetites, but crave their indulgence, your life is not one of true poverty, but of misery. Such a life is without virtue and reward; it is a laborious and fruitless dissatisfaction. For evil desire with consent is sufficient to destroy all moral worth, and constitutes sin. Do not suppose that, with such a state of heart, you can rise up to prayer or contemplation, or receive the hundred-fold reward. How can you draw near to the purity of God and of Heaven, when you are polluted and grimed with the mire and filth of earth? Therefore love to be poor in spirit, and detached from earthly possessions; let the beauty of such poverty be dear to you and attract you. Keep the form of it perfect, and yield not to the desire of unnecessary things.

If you ask, "What is necessary?" I reply, that which you cannot do without. But even if you renounce all, not only in spirit, but in act, your poverty will fall far short of that of Jesus Christ, and will bear no comparison with it.

His poverty was one of *contrast*, for He was rich and the Lord of all, and He assumed voluntarily a form of poverty which involved not only want, but contempt. Those who give up all become oftentimes honourable in the eyes of others, on account of their unselfishness; but Christ's poverty, though it was of all the most voluntary, yet was it not so understood at the time, and therefore it brought Him nothing but shame and reproach. When He was seen by all, to be without home, without possessions, without any resource whatever, He was all the more despised. The poor, alas, are often trodden down by the world; let us be careful that we do not despise those who in a special sense represent the Lord. That it is desirable for us to become, at least in spirit, like our Lord in this matter, let us hear what S. Bernard says thereon: "Let us imitate as much as we can Him who so loved poverty, that, although He held the ends of the earth in His hand, yet had He not where to lay His Head; so that His disciples, we read, were so pressed with hunger that they rubbed the ears of corn with their hands and eat them, as they passed through the field."[1] And again, "Why should the Saviour, who possessed all riches, make poverty sacred in His own body? Why does this poverty occupy so conspicuous a place in the Angel's message? 'This,' said he, 'shall be a sign unto you; ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes.' Yes, Lord Jesu, the swaddling clothes are placed for a sign; but for a sign which, by many to this day, shall be spoken against. This is given to us for an example, that we should do the same."[2] And further on, the same writer says, "In our conflict a breastplate of iron is more useful than a linen garment; although the one is burdensome, and the other is honourable." And again, "It is a great and intolerable abuse, that a vile worm should wish to be rich, for

[1] Serm. 4 in Advent. [2] Serm. 4 in Nat. Dom.

whose sake the God of Glory, the Lord of Hosts, willed to become poor." And in another place, S. Bernard says, "It is not poverty which is estimated a virtue, it is the affection toward it and the spirit of it." "The friendship of the poor makes friends of kings; but poverty makes us kings, for to the poor 'is the kingdom of heaven.'" And below, "Blessed is he who is not attached to goods, the possession of which is an anxiety; the affection for which, a stain; the loss of which, a torture."

From the example, then, of the Apostles, the authority of S. Bernard, and what he has said on the Nativity of our Lord, and the Sermon on the Mount, you will have now learnt, that to be poor in spirit is a very great virtue.

But of abstinence and against gluttony what shall we say? We have in this respect much to learn from this act of the disciples. Although this is not my principal point, yet for your advantage I must treat thereof, that the nature of the virtues may be the better known, and that you may be able to imitate them in their great Exemplar.

Gluttony, then, must be avoided, and war against it carried on unremittingly. Much, indeed, has been written on this subject by those who are masters of that warfare. Hear again S. Bernard:[1] "Whence comes this pusillanimity, this miserable slavery, that a noble creature, capable of Eternal Bliss, and of glorifying God, by whose inspiration he was created, signed with His likeness, redeemed with His Blood, gifted with faith, adopted through the Spirit, is not ashamed of becoming the wretched slave of the appetites of this corruptible body? Ah, indeed! It seems incomprehensible that such a Heavenly Love should be forsaken for such vile affections!" And again, "It is an insane labour to abandon the care of the heart, and to be occupied with the desires of the flesh, to fatten that which

[1] Serm. ad Cler. xiii.

so soon will become a corpse, and without doubt be the food of the worm."

You see how gluttony is a vice to be resisted, though we may take what is necessary for the body and for health. "The only thing which is of importance to the body is health, and it is our duty to it to be careful to preserve it. Nothing more is wanted in regard to it, no fruits can be gained from it, and its end is death."[1] And again, "If the body is made subservient to pleasure, and not to health, this is not in accordance with the law of nature, but beneath it; and when pleasure gains the mastery over it, death is soon at hand. Hence it is, when this principle of pleasure is the ruling one, that so many descend to, or rather fall into, excesses, like animals (or worse than they), and eat and drink not only without care for their health, but with the certain knowledge that their self-indulgence will entail much acute and wearisome sufferings."

"As the need of the body is health, so the need of the soul is purity; for the troubled eye cannot see God, and the human heart is made for this, that it should contemplate its Maker. But if care is required to keep the body in health, much more anxiety should be expended on preserving purity of soul, since it is the superior part of our being." "If you are particular in choice of food, in accordance with the advice of the physician, you are not to blame for the care of your own body, for no one hateth his own flesh." However, such a care may be carried to too great a length, and be practised when the call for it has ceased. We ought not so to bind ourselves to such rules, as at last to live artificially. "Beware that the Master's sentence condemn not this wisdom of the flesh, by which pleasure degenerates into luxury, and health becomes a pretext for superfluities." "What profit is there in abstaining from

[1] Serm. de tripl. gen.

pleasures, and yet spending your time in seeking, by changes of food and delicacy of preparation, to supply your needs on the ground that this or that is injurious, and produces bad effects? Think, I pray you, of your repose, of the toil of servants, of the expense of the house, of your conscience. I will not say yours, but, at least, of the conscience of others, who are witnesses of your extravagance and self-indulgence. All this becomes a scandal, a piece of hypocrisy, a veiled form of selfishness." "In vain is S. Paul quoted to authorize this gratification, because he bade his disciple take a little wine for his stomach's sake, and his often infirmities. They should at first remark—who would shelter their excesses under this permission—that it was not the Apostle's own practice, nor did the disciple ask this thing. He advised it in the case of Timothy, who was a Bishop, and whose life was extremely necessary for the Church still in its infancy. Such was Timothy, and give me another Timothy, and then he may, if he be in the same circumstances, have gold for food if you like, and drink of balm. Others, through self-pity, apply what is the easier line to themselves. We should be suspicious of our judgments, when they lean to the side of indulgence. However, if you will take S. Paul's advice to yourself, apply it to the letter, and do not forget the important qualification contained in the word '*a little*,'—'take a little wine.'" Thus far S. Bernard. You learn, then, that it is a duty to take care of the health of the body, but that it must not be a matter of too anxious consideration.

But what of abstinence? Hear not me, but S. Bernard:[1] "Spirit and flesh, fire and lukewarmness, cannot co-exist in the same dwelling: lukewarmness is especially offensive to the Lord. For if the Apostles, whilst still cleaving to the Saviour's Flesh, Who was alone holy—for it was the Body

[1] Serm. iii. de Asc. Dom.

of the Holy of Holies—were unable to be filled with the Holy Spirit until Christ's departure, do you think that you, bound and tied to your flesh, which is polluted and filled with evil tendencies without number, can receive the Spirit of purity itself, unless you have striven to renounce entirely the consolations of the flesh? Doubtless, when you commence, sadness will fill your heart; but if you persevere, your sadness shall be turned into joy. Then, indeed, will your affections be purified, your will renewed, and you shall become a new creature; so that all which seemed at first hard, yea, impossible, you shall now get through with much sweetness and avidity." [1]

"We do not blame S. Paul, because he kept under his body and brought it into subjection, by abstaining from wine; wine too often appertains to luxury. But although the weak might take a little, in accordance with the Apostle's counsel, I will practise self-denial, lest I nourish my body too much, and therefore nourish also its vices. I will practise moderation at my repasts, lest, from being surcharged with food, I become dull in prayer, and bring upon myself the Prophet's reproach as to fulness of bread. Even water should not be gulped, but taken in proper quantity and without eagerness." Again, "Wine and such things, delicacies, savoury meats, condiments, etc., do not profit the spirit, but serve the flesh and minister to greediness, unless weak health and want of appetite render such things necessary. But when the spirit begins to be reformed according to the image of its Maker, soon the flesh begins to blossom anew and to follow the renewal of the spirit. For that which delights the spirit begins also to delight the flesh, even contrary to its own sense. Moreover, in consequence of its manifold misdoings, and in punishment of its numberless sins, in thirsting after God,

[1] Serm. 3, de Asc. Dom.

sometimes it strives even to outstrip its guide. Since our pleasures are not lost to us, we only transfer them from the body to the soul, from the senses to the conscience. The plainest fare may be received with a joyous contentment, for in the love of Jesus and in inward joys are true delight. Are not thousands of the poor satisfied with most simple food? It is easy and agreeable to live in a natural manner, if only we have the condiment of the love of God; if our folly would only permit us so to live. Nature, when healed, is soon at ease with that which is itself natural. Hard work hardens the nerves and strengthens the arm of the labourer; this is the effect of use, for with time habit is formed. The will in the same manner creates use; use, exercise, and thus gives strength for any kind of labour."

The necessity of abstinence, then, is very evident. The ancient Fathers, and S. Francis and S. Clare, most carefully observed it. There are, however, limits to its exercise. S. Bernard marks three of these. First, obedience is better than sacrifice, and therefore abstinence must not be adopted in defiance of rightful authority. Secondly, it should not be practised to the prejudice of others, giving them offence, and having an appearance of singularity. Thirdly, it should not be unduly exercised to the detriment of health. "Indiscreet abstinence," says the same writer, "is a vice, and not a virtue." We should always avoid peculiarity, and be content to give up our own will or liking for the common good. "You take," otherwise, "self-will for your guide, through which your conscience tells you you have committed so many offences against God. It teaches you not to yield to nature or reason, or counsel, or example." "Know ye not that the angel of Satan[1] is often transformed into an angel of light?" God is Wisdom, and wills to be loved not only tenderly but wisely. Wherefore

[1] 2 Cor. xi. 14.

the Apostle says, your service should be a "reasonable service."[1] The spirit of error is liable to corrupt zeal, unless zeal be accompanied with knowledge. There is no more subtle device of the enemy for taking away Divine Love out of the soul, than to make the soul walk without prudence and reason. To persevere in practices which are forbidden, or to affect singularity, is not to preserve piety, but to forfeit it: for One hath said, "Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as idolatry."[2] And, "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." Singularity of conduct in a house is offensive, and produces discord. Is it not discord, a source of scruples, and the ruin of the vine which the hand of the Lord hath planted, this loss of uniformity? "Woe to him by whom the offence cometh! Woe to him who shall offend one of these little ones!" Terrible is the remainder of the verse. What, then, shall be the sharp chastisement of him who offends not one but a multitude, and a holy multitude, too? The hardest judgment he will have to bear, whoever he be.

S. Bernard says,[3] "For those who attain to the grace of devotion, there remains a last peril, and a very fearful one—that of the demon at midday. For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.[4] This, then, is to be feared—a certain delight which some feel in doing all things, which, if they yield to without moderation, they destroy their bodily health; and then have to give up their spiritual exercises, that they may attend to their infirmities. In order that he who runs may not fall, he needs to be illumined with the light of discretion, which is a mother of virtues, and the end of perfection. By this, we are taught to do neither too much nor too little. And this is the eighth day on which the

[1] Rom. xii. 1.
[2] 1 Sam. xv. 23.
[3] Serm. 3, de Circ. Dom.
[4] 2 Cor. xi. 14.

Child was circumcised, for true discretion circumcises, as it were, our actions. He who errs by excess, needs to have his works circumcised that he may reap the fruit of them. He who errs by defect, sins by lukewarmness, and needs to bring them up to the right limit. On the same day, this Divine Infant received the Name, the Name of Salvation! And of him who is in conformity with this mystery of Circumcision, I hesitate not to say, that he is working out his salvation. Angels, before this, who know heavenly secrets, may have known it; but now first I am able trustfully to ascribe to him this name of salvation.

"But discretion is a rare bird on the earth, and its place is often supplied by obedience, exact and submissive, to the bidding of those who are set over us. Bodily mortification, when carried to excess, deprives the body of its good effect; the spirit, of its affection; our neighbour, of good example; God, of His glory; and in all these respects renders us guilty towards God. The body—the members of which have been the servants of unrighteousness—may be afflicted, but it should not be injured. 'Bodily exercise,' says the Apostle, 'profiteth little; but godliness is profitable unto all things.'[1] But this 'little' is, not in respect of its appetites, but that a proper care of the flesh might be observed, and the sobriety of a certain spiritual restraint be practised, so that nothing excessive, either in measure, mode, or degree, unbecoming to the servant of God, may appear in this exercise."

But that the virtue of discretion be the better known, hear again what S. Bernard says in praise of it:[2] "The virtue of discretion languishes without the fervour of charity, and a vehement fervour without the moderation of discretion is destructive. He is to be praised who conjoins these two, with whom fervour reveals discretion, and discretion guides

[1] 1 Tim. iv. 8. [2] Serm. xxiii. in Cant.

fervour." And again, "Discretion gives order to virtue, and order gives its right measure, from which flow its beauty and perpetuity. It is by order, says the Psalmist, that the days are established, and by 'days' virtue is signified. In short, discretion is not so much a distinct virtue, as a certain moderator and rein of virtues, a regulator of affections, a mistress of manners. Take away discretion, and virtue becomes vice, and natural affection a cause of trouble and of its own defeat."

You have seen, then, at length, how, in this example of the disciples plucking the ears of corn, we are warned against luxury and gluttony. But I have not said how their conduct condemned the pomps of the world. I cannot altogether pass this over in silence, although I cannot now enter into this matter. It will be sufficient to say, that by their example we have a sort of return to the happy simplicity of primitive times, in which men were content with what nature set before them, with fruits of trees, and roots of vegetables, and pure water. If there was something of this simplicity of living now, we should not want so many machines, such utensils, such apparel, such sumptuous houses and furniture, which in these days, by their very complication, are a sort of intricate burden to human life.

CHAPTER XLV.

Of the Ministrations of Martha and of Mary. Also of the order of Contemplation, and its Two Parts.

One day the Lord Jesus went to Bethany, to the house of Martha and Mary, who loved him with all their heart, and received Him with all reverence and with great joy.

Martha, the sister of Mary, for her part, was occupied in preparing a banquet as honourable as possible, for our Lord and His disciples. But Mary sat at the feet of our Lord. And when our Lord, who could never be idle, spake to her, as His manner was, the words of eternal life, she, with eyes and ears intent upon Him, was delighted with His conversation beyond expression; neither thought she of anything else. Martha, then, was pained at her seeming want of consideration, and bade our Lord compel her to take part in the preparations with which she was herself so much occupied. But our Lord was not of her opinion, and was told that Mary had chosen the best part. Now Mary, who had been absorbed in her Lord's words, awoke, as it were, to a sense of her sister's vexation, like one startled out of sleep, and turning her face towards the ground, remained silent. But after our Lord's reply to Martha, Mary rested more securely and more sweetly than ever.

Then, the repast being ready, and our Lord ceasing to speak, she arose at once, and brought Him water for His hands, and henceforth sitting near Him, served Him most attentively. Behold, then, our Lord entering the house, see with what intense joy they receive Him; and dwell, as we have before prescribed, upon every act, for every feature of this event is most beautiful.

You must know, that these two sisters represent the Active and Contemplative Life. This is a subject which must be dealt with at some length, but I will be as brief as possible, and take S. Bernard throughout for my guide. We live a double kind of life, and often we know not how to do so. The Active Life is signified by Martha. But in this life there are two parts. The first part is that in which each one lives chiefly for his own good, correcting his vices, putting on virtues, and benefiting his neighbour, by works of justice, piety, and charity. The second part is that in

which a man exerts himself chiefly for the benefit of his neighbour, all the while, of course, also benefiting his own soul; for example, in guiding others, teaching and helping them, thus procuring their salvation, as Bishops, Preachers, etc., do.

Now, between the two parts of the Active Life, lies the Contemplative, and this is the order. At first, a soul exercises itself in prayer, the study of Holy Scripture, and other good and pious works, in order to uproot vices and acquire virtues. Secondly, it reposes in contemplation, in seeking solitude, and in giving itself individually to waiting upon God. Thirdly, when once embued by the two preceding exercises, with virtue and wisdom, it proceeds to give itself to the work of saving others. It must first be, as I have shown in the first part of the Active Life, that the soul must be washed, cleansed, and strengthened in the exercise of virtues; then, in the Contemplative Life, it must be formed, enlightened, and enkindled; and then, finally, it can give itself with confidence to the service and aid of others.

We will now proceed with the authorities for this order; and first point out how the Active Life ought to precede the Contemplative.

CHAPTER XLVI.

The Active precedes the Contemplative Life.

S. BERNARD speaks in this wise:[1] "Jesus, having arrived at the town, the two sisters, Martha and Mary, that is to say, action and thought, met him. And Jesus, having come to them, conferred upon each that which was fitting: upon action, strength; upon thought, wisdom. The Apostle

[1] Serm. 2, de Assump. Virg.

praised both, and referred to them in the passage 'the power of God and the wisdom of God.' But why is it Martha meets Him at the entrance to the town, whilst Mary sat still in the house, and Martha first was busy in serving Him, Mary afterwards sat at His feet and heard His words? Is it not as much as to say, action goes before contemplation, and is followed by it? Indeed, every one who wills to attain to the rest of contemplation must first diligently lead a life of labour, as it is written, 'My Son, if thou desire wisdom, keep the commandments, and the Lord shall give her unto thee.'[1] And again, 'Through Thy commandments I get understanding.'[2] And again, 'Purifying their hearts by faith.'[3] But what faith? Faith that worketh by love." The same Saint says also,[4] "Perhaps, you aspire to the rest of contemplation: you do well. But you must not forget the flowers with which the couch of the Spouse must be covered. Be careful, then, to adorn your own with the flowers of good works, and remember that holy repose is the product of the exercise of virtues, as fruits are formed from flowers. There may be something of sloth in the repose you desire, unless labour purchase it. The fruitfulness of Leah must precede the embrace of Rachel. Otherwise, we reverse the order of the Apostle, 'If any would not work, neither should he eat.'[5] 'Through obeying Thy commandments,' says the Psalmist, 'I get understanding;' that is, the joy of contemplation arises from keeping the Divine Law. If obedience and deference to tradition were set aside by this love of contemplation, then the couch of the Spouse would not be covered with flowers, but with nettles and hemlock, neither would He respond to your prayers and calls. God does not approve of idleness; He says by the Prophet, 'When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide Mine eyes from you;[6] yea, when ye make

[1] Eccl. i. 26. [2] Ps. cxix. 104. [3] Acts xv. 9.
[4] Serm. xlvi. in Cant. [5] 2 Thess. iii. 10. [6] Is. i. 15.

many prayers I will not hear.' Your couch is not decked with flowers, but stained and polluted, and can you in such a state invite the King of Glory to come to you?" And again, "Do you continue to spread forth your hands towards God, you who annoy your brethren, cause disunion, and withdraw from them? But what is required of you? You must purge your conscience from all stain of anger, contention, murmuring, envy, and put far from you everything that is contrary to peace and rightful submission. Then bring about you the flowers of good actions and praiseworthy pursuits, the perfumes of virtues, that is to say, of everything that is true, everything that is just, everything that is holy, everything that is lovely, everything that is of good report, whether in virtue or discipline. Think of these things, give thyself wholly to them. Thus, and thus only, will you be able to call upon the Spouse with safety, when you can introduce Him in this manner, saying, 'Our couch is flowery, my conscience, that is, is redolent of graces, piety, peace, meekness, justice, obedience, brightness, lowliness.'" It will thus be seen how the first part of the Active Life must precede the Contemplative.

CHAPTER XLVII.

Of Prayer. Also, of Seven Qualifications of a Good Teacher.

We will now consider how the Contemplative Life goes before the second part of the Active Life, occupying, as it were, a middle position between them.

S. Bernard says,[1] "We should be on our guard against giving that which we have received for ourselves, and against

[1] Serm. xviii. in Cant.

retaining that which we ought to give. Thus, you retain that which you should impart, if, when full of virtues and gifted with eloquence and knowledge, you, through fear, or idleness, or false humility, preserve an unpardonable silence, when by your words you might edify others; and thus you incur the condemnation of him who withholds 'corn from the people.'[1] On the contrary, you scatter that which is your own and lose it, if, before you are filled, being still half-full of yourself, you hasten to pour it out upon others, labouring contrary to the law, with the first-born of oxen, or shearing the first-born of sheep. You rob yourself of that salvation and life which you communicate to others, when, without a pure intention—either puffed up with vain-glory or actuated by some motive of earthly gain—you perform your actions. If you were wise, you would show yourself more like a shell than a mere canal. The second gives out as soon as it receives, the first waits until it is full before it overflows. You, my friend, whose own salvation is but little assured, whose charity is nothing, or but frail, and yields like a reed to every breath, believes every spirit, and is shaken by every wind of doctrine; you, whose charity seems so great, that it outstrips the precept and loves neighbour more than self, and yet at the same time is so feeble, so small, that, contrary to the precept, it melts before favour, quails before fear, is troubled by sadness, is fettered by avarice, yields to suspicion, is disquieted by ambition, is angered by injurious words, is devoured by anxiety, is elated by honour, is consumed by envy, by what madness have you brought yourself to think that you ought to be occupied with the care of others? Hear what caution advises, and watchful charity: 'I mean not,' says the Apostle, 'that other men be eased, and ye burdened,'[2] but that there should be 'equality.' Do not 'make thyself over wise.'[3]

[1] Prov. xi. 26. [2] 2 Cor. viii. 13, 14. [3] Eccl. vii. 16.

It is enough for you to love your neighbour as yourself, that there may be 'equality.' And again, 'Fill yourself, then shall you overflow to others.' A mild and prudent charity observes a just proportion, as Solomon teaches, 'and does not only overflow.' And the Apostle's admonition is to the same effect. Who is more holy than Paul, or more wise than Solomon? See how much we need, then, for our own salvation, and let us be careful to receive before we presume to give.

"But as the physician approaches the wounded, so does the Spirit approach the soul. For who has not been some time wounded by the darts of Satan? First, then, the tumour or ulcer must be removed. It must be opened with the sharp needle of compunction if the sore of evil habit is to be healed. But the pain is sharp, and the operation must be soothed by the unction of devotion, which is nothing else but the joy which springs from the hope of pardon. 'Thou,' says the Psalmist, 'hast loosed my bonds. I will offer to Thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving.'[1] Then follow the remedies of repentance, fastings, watchings, prayers, alms, a life of good works, for good works are a nourishment of the soul. 'My meat,' says our Lord, 'is to do the will of Him that sent Me.'[2] And again, by alms, 'thou layest up a good treasure in the sight of the Most High.'[3] Food excites thirst, therefore to the food of good works will be added the drink of prayer; the two together, as it were, digested in the conscience, become well-pleasing to God. It is by praying that the wine which maketh glad the heart of man is drunk, the wine of the Spirit which elevates, produces oblivion of carnal joys, bedews the interior of the parched conscience, causes the food of good works to digest, unfolds itself throughout the powers of the soul, strengthens faith, enkindles hope, vivifies and enriches charity, and

[1] Ps. cxvi. 16, 17. [2] S. John iv. 34. [3] Tobit iv. 11.

makes luxuriant the fruits of holiness. It is after food and drink, and strenuous exertion, that we can go to rest, and enjoy the refreshing calm of contemplation. Thus the soul rests in the Lord in contemplative prayer, seeing as in a glass darkly,[1] and filled with desire for a Vision, by a sort of scintillation of His glory as He passes by. 'With my soul,' says the Prophet, 'have I desired Thee in the night; yea, with my spirit have I sought Thee early.'[2] Such is the love which glows in the soul, and which the faithful servant should possess, whom His Lord places over His household,[3] that he may possess the power of sympathy, and impart that glow to others. 'Who is weak, and I am not weak; who is offended, and I burn not?' There is no room for vanity, where all is occupied by charity; and charity, if it is perfect, is the fulfilling of the law and the satisfaction of the heart. In short, God is love, and nothing created can fill the creature who is made after the image of God, but God who is love, and who alone is greater than it. Without this love, it is dangerous to be prominent, even though possessing other virtues. 'Though I have all knowledge, though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, I am nothing,'[4] says S. Paul. See, then, what we ought to receive, before we presume to give out! First, compunction; secondly, devotion; thirdly, the travail of penitence; fourthly, labour of piety; fifthly, fervour of prayer; sixthly, the rest of contemplation; seventhly, the fulness of charity. All these that One and Selfsame Spirit createth in us by the operation which is called *infusion*, up to the point where the other operation, which is called *effusion*, can purely and safely come into exercise to the praise and glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Again, the same author says, "The purpose of true

[1] 1 Cor. xiii. 12.
[2] Is. xxvi. 9.
[3] S. Matt. xxiv. 45.
[4] 1 Cor. xiii. 2, 3.

and chaste contemplation is to inflame the soul with a vehement glow of Divine love, to fill it with zeal, and with an intense desire of possessing God, who loves it in return, when the rest of contemplation is freely abandoned for the claims of active duty. In such case, after devotion has been intermitted, the soul will return to it with greater sweetness and delight, and, having tasted this heavenly joy, will be less enamoured of the joys of earth. Thus the soul will check itself by the alternate emotions of fear and desire —fearing lest it should in a little matter deviate from the will of God, and desiring to fulfil it more and more, both in devotion and action. Perhaps it was something like this Job felt when he said, 'When I lie down, I say, When shall I arise, and the night be gone?'[1] That is, during my enjoyment of rest in God, I fear neglect of work; during work, I fear neglect of devotion. The holy man seemed to hesitate between the fruit of active service, and the rest of contemplation; whilst always well occupied, he nevertheless was full of compunction for faults and errors, and every moment sorrowfully inquiring after the will of God. The only remedy for this state is prayer; it is the only refuge. By frequent ejaculations towards God we must discover from Him what we ought to do, and when and how to do it." [2]

We have now some idea of the two parts of the Active Life, and how between them is the Contemplative Life, and know something of their order and mutual relation.

But of the third point, that is, the second part of the Active Life, we have no intention here to treat; it consists in ministerial duties and labouring for souls, which form no part of our present subject. What is needed, as the preliminary of contemplation, is the zeal which is exhibited in correcting our vices, and in forming virtues, which constitutes the first part of the Active Life.

[1] Job vii. 4. [2] Serm. lvii. in Cant.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

Of the Exercises of the Active Life.

Of the Active Life we have already spoken, especially from S. Bernard's forty-sixth sermon on the Canticles. However, I should like to bring forward further quotations from this Saint's writings, that we may the more carefully avoid vices, and the more ardently cultivate virtues.[1] "'Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy, break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord,'[2] says the Prophet. He has put knowledge last, as a picture which cannot be stretched upon a void. Thus there are two conditions which go before it, and give it, as it were, a solid basis. You will come to knowledge assuredly; if first, through the benefit of hope, 'reaping in mercy,' you find peace. You sow to righteousness, if, by the true knowledge of yourself, you have watched in the fear of God, if you have wept, given alms, done works of piety, if you have fasted, if you have smitten your breast again and again with compunction, given Heaven no rest with your cries. This is to sow to righteousness. The seeds, they are the good works, the good movements of zeal; the seeds, they are the tears. 'He that goeth,' says the Psalmist, 'on his way weeping, beareth forth good seed.'"[3]

Speaking in the name of the spouse, who addresses the companions of the Bridegroom, and seeks a kiss, that is, the joy of rapt contemplation, S. Bernard says, "If He has the least care for me, 'let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth.' I am not ungrateful, I love."[4] And again,

[1] Serm. xxxvii. in Cant.
[2] Hos. x. 12.
[3] Ps. cxxvi. 6.
[4] Serm. ix. in Cant.

"For long years I have striven to live in soberness and chastity; I occupy myself in reading, I resist vices, I bow myself in frequent prayer, I watch against temptations, I pass my years in the bitterness of my soul, I study, as much as I am able, to live in peace with my brethren, in submission to those who are set over me, and in all my actions reverence my elders. I covet nothing of another's, I have spent myself and my goods on others, I have eaten bread with the sweat of my brow, but what has come of it all?—only habit, no sweetness." "I have fulfilled all Thy commandments, but my soul is in the midst of them, as earth without water. That my burnt offering may be fat, O, I pray Him to kiss me with the kiss of His mouth."

"You," again S. Bernard says,[1] "if you impart liberally to your companions the gift which you have received from above, if you have shown yourself on all sides courteous, affectionate, humble, pleasant, tractable, every one will bear testimony that you diffuse around you the odour of most precious perfumes. Whoever not only supports the infirmities of the weak, whether bodily or spiritual, but further, if he can and may, aids them with kindnesses, sustains them with counsel, or does not cease to help them by his prayers,—whoever, I say, bestows such benefits, gives forth a sweet odour, an odour of the best ointments, a balm for its sweetness. Such an one in the midst of a congregation may be pointed at and addressed in these words, 'This is a lover of the brethren, and of Israel, 'who prayeth much for the people, and for the holy city.'"[2] "Such are the masters who have fully learnt from the Great Master of all, the ways of life, and teach us to this day. What have we learnt from them, what have they taught us, these holy Apostles? Not. indeed, the fisherman's art, or that of tent-making; not, indeed, to read Plato, nor to be conversant with the

[1] Serm. xii. in Cant. [2] 2 Macc. xv. 14.

subtleties of Aristotle; not always to be learning, without ever coming to the knowledge of the truth. No, they have taught us to *live*. Do you deem it a small thing, to know how to live? No, it is something great, yea, very great. He has not learnt it who is puffed up with pride, who is stained with self-indulgence, who is labouring under all the plagues of the soul. This is not to live, this is to destroy life, or hasten towards the gates of death. To live well, according to me, is to suffer evil, do well, and persevere to the end. It is vulgarly said, 'He who eats well, lives well.' But wickedness deceives itself, for he does not live well who does not do good. I think you who are amongst others, live well if you live regularly, sociably, and humbly—regularly, in regard to yourself; sociably, in reference to others; humbly, before God. Regularly, by walking circumspectly in the presence of God and before others, guarding yourself from sin and from being a ground of offence. Sociably, by loving and being loved, showing yourself kind and affable, bearing patiently and even cheerfully the infirmities of the weak, both moral and corporeal. Humbly, by keeping yourself, after you have discharged your duties, from the spirit of vanity, which is apt to spring from the consideration of their proper accomplishment; by promptly stopping whatever movements of self-complacency you experience.

"Further, we must bear evil aright; and as there are three kinds of evil, so there are three ways of meeting it. There is the evil which you suffer from yourself, the evil which comes from your neighbour, and the evil which is from God. The first is the austerity of penitence, the second is the vexation from another's malice, the third is the scourge of Divine chastisement. In that which you suffer from yourself, you ought to make a voluntary sacrifice of it; in that which is from your neighbour, you should manifest patience; in

that which is from God, you should avoid murmuring, and accept it with thankfulness."[1] This, concerning the exercise of the first part of the Active Life, will suffice.

CHAPTER XLIX.

Concerning the Exercise of the Contemplative Life.

Our next subject is the Contemplative Life. S. Bernard speaks of it thus: "The Bridegroom, the well-beloved, places 'His left hand' under the head of the spouse, that she may rest and sleep. And now, as her guardian, watches her with all possible tenderness, lest her maidens, in their constant and minute necessities, awake her."[2] And again, "I have exceeding joy in the thought, that His Majesty should deign to abase Himself so as to hold sweet and familiar intercourse with our feebleness, and that the Supreme Deity should not think it beneath Him to be united with the soul which is exiled. If I doubt not that I shall obtain in Heaven, that of which on earth I read in Holy Scripture, my soul responds to the truth of the sacred page, except that it cannot express all that my soul will then become, and even now is able to feel. What, then, shall it receive, think you, this soul which is already gifted with such familiarity with, and is already admitted to the embrace of, God; cherished, as it were, in His bosom, guarded by His care, watched over by His love, lest whilst sleeping, by any one it should be stirred, before it awake of itself?" "This sleep of the spouse is not a bodily sleep. It is a sleep of life, a wakeful sleep, illuminating the inner being, driving away death, and giving an assurance of life eternal. Indeed, this

[1] Serm. i. in Fest. Pet. [2] Serm. lii. super Cant.

sleep is one which does not dull the senses, but steals them away. It is a sort of death. I hesitate not to say so, since the Apostle commends those who, whilst living in the flesh, 'are dead,' and their 'life hid with Christ in God.'[1] Therefore I, without any absurdity, call this ecstasy of the Spouse death, who indeed not from life itself, but from the snares of life, escapes, and is thus enabled to say, 'My soul is escaped, as a bird out of the snare of the hunter.'[2] We walk, indeed, in this life in the midst of snares, which are not to be feared, so long as with some holy and fervent thought the soul is occupied, if it rise up thereby to such a height as to be beyond the reach of ordinary habit, and ways of thinking. 'In vain is the net spread in the sight of the bird.'[3] Who, then, would fear temptations to evil desire and appetite, where life itself was not felt? For when the soul is so absorbed, that if not life, yet the consciousness of life, is suspended, how then can it feel temptation? 'Who will give me wings like a dove, that I may fly away and be at rest.'[4] Please God, may I oftentimes be thus withdrawn from things of sense, that I may escape the snares of death, and not feel the deadly blandishments of a life of ease and pleasure, that I may be insensible to the temptations of the flesh, to the fire of avarice, to the goads of anger and impatience, to the distress of anxiety, to the disappointments of earthly cares! May my soul die the death of the righteous, so that no injustice may ensnare it, no wickedness allure it. It is a good death, which does not take away life, which brings in a better life; good, that by which the body does not fall, but the soul is raised, but this is the death of men. My soul also dies, if it may be said, with the death of angels; going forth from the memory of the present, it despoils itself not only of the desire, but also of the images of inferior and corporeal things, and its

[1] Col. iii. 3. [2] Ps. cxxiv. 7. [3] Prov. i. 17. [4] Ps. lv. 6.

conversation is confined to those things which bear the impress of perfect purity. Such is the state, I think, which deserves the name of contemplation. It is the part of human virtue, to live in the midst of temptations, and not to be enchained by them; but to rise above all material forms, is a mark of angelic purity. Both, it is true, are the gift of God. Both are kinds of death, both break through the barriers of self-love, but one rises higher than the other. Blessed is he who is able to say, 'I get me away far off, and remain in the wilderness.'[1] He was not content to go forth, unless he went far, that he might find rest. You have freed yourself from the snares of the flesh to such a degree as not to obey its lusts, nor be held by its seductions, in going forth you have separated yourself; but you have not yet gone 'far off' unless you are able, in the purity of your mind, to soar above those phantoms of material things which rush into it. Do not promise yourself rest, until you reach this point. You are deceived, if you hope to find on this side of it a place of repose, an inner solitude, a calm light, a peaceful resting-place. Show me some one who has tasted all these, and I at once acknowledge that he is capable of saying from his own experience, 'Turn to thy rest, O my soul, turn to thy rest, because the Lord hath rewarded thee.'[2] Here is truly a place of solitude, a dwelling-place of light."

Again, the same writer says, "I think that this is the solitude into which the spouse is drawn, and where, charmed by the beauty of the place, the soul sleeps in the embrace of her Husband, that is to say, is elevated in spirit; and that, during the time her maidens, her companions, have received orders not to disturb her before she desires. And how is this? These companions have not received a simple and slight admonition, but one given in a new and unwonted

[1] Ps. lv. 6. [2] Ps. cxvi. 7.

manner, 'by the roes and by the hinds of the field.'[1] These creatures seem to represent holy souls delivered from the burden of the flesh, also the angels who are with God from their keenness of sight, and swiftness of flight; for these two qualities, we know, appertain to these spirits, for easily do they mount high, and dive down into the depths. That they are said to belong to 'the field,' evidently indicates their freedom and power of roaming, as it were, in the open spaces of contemplation. But why this adjuration, 'I charge you'? Certainly, lest the maidens, restless and light, should for some slight cause distract the Spouse in this precious companionship, into which the Spouse is admitted as often as the gift of contemplation is imparted. Fairly, then, are they deterred from awaking the Spouse, who herself is ever in due time solicitous for their welfare. The Bridegroom knows her ardent love for her companions, her maternal affection for them, her desire ever to grant them their requests, and to be with them; it is on this account that he determines to entrust this arrangement to her discretion."

CHAPTER L.

Of Three Kinds of Contemplation.

You must know that there are three kinds of contemplation; the two principal regard the perfect; the third is added for the imperfect. Those kinds of contemplation which suit the perfect are upon the Majesty of God, and the Heavenly Court. The third, which is for beginners, and for imperfect persons, is on the Humanity of Christ, which I now in this

[1] Song of Sol. ii. 7.

book describe. You must commence with this, if you would mount up to the others; otherwise you will make no progress, and remain in the state of fear. Very necessary, then, is the teaching which follows; for never will you safely attain to the high things of God, unless you, for a long time and diligently, exercise yourself in the preliminary kind of contemplation.

Upon this S. Bernard speaks thus: "You know, there are two kinds of contemplation; one on the state, the bliss, and glory of the City which is above, the actions and the rest of the vast multitude which occupy the Heavenly Court; the other on the Majesty, the Eternity, the Divinity of the King Himself. The one is the wall around the stone; the other is the stone itself. The more difficult it is to penetrate into the second, the more sweet is that which is extracted from it. But as the Church cannot on every side penetrate this stone, and as it is not given to all those who are in the Church to contemplate the secrets of the Divine Will, nor to comprehend in themselves the deep things of God; therefore one is able to dwell not only in the clefts of the rock, but also in the excavations of the wall which is around it. Thus, the perfect are those who, daring from the purity of their conscience and the depth of their understanding, to penetrate into the secrets of wisdom, dwell in the clefts of the rock. The rest remain in the excavations of the wall. Those who are not capable of penetrating the rock, or who may not dare, are content to dig about the inclosure, or to trace in spirit the glory of the saints. If even this may not seem possible to any one, propose to him Jesus crucified, so that he without labour may dwell in the holes of the rock, which he has not cut. The Jews pierced Him, and he must enter into the labours of the unbeliever, that he may become a believer. Nor should he fear that he will suffer repulse who is invited to enter.

'Enter into the rock,' says the Prophet, 'and hide thee in the caves of the earth, for fear of the Lord and for the glory of His majesty.'[1] For the weak and effortless soul, the holes are already dug, where a hiding-place may be found, until strength and health are gained: so that he may at length be able to penetrate into the living stone, by which access may be obtained into the depths of the Incarnate Word, through the vigour and purity of his spirit. And if by the holes of the earth we mean that the text says, 'They pierced My hands and My feet,' there can be no doubt of the salvation of the soul which finds a refuge there. What is more efficacious for healing the wounds of conscience, and for purging the inner eye of the soul, than the constant meditation on the Wounds of Christ? But until the soul is perfectly healed and cured, I do not see how one is able to apply to it these words, 'Let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice.'[2] How can the soul dare to show its face, or raise its voice, when it is bidden to hide itself? 'Hide thyself,' says the Prophet, 'in the caves of the earth.' Why? if not because the face is not fair, not worthy to be seen? It is not worthy to be seen, as long as it is not able to see itself. But when, by dwelling in the caves of the earth, the inner eye of the soul has been healed, so that with open face the glory of God can be beheld; then, indeed, what is seen he will trustfully declare, being acceptable both in voice and countenance. For it is necessary that the countenance should be pleasing to God, which is raised up to the contemplation of His glory; and this it cannot be, unless it is clear and pure itself, and is transformed into the same brightness which it contemplates; otherwise it will be thrown back by the force of the unwonted brightness with which it is itself in contrast. Therefore, when the pure countenance can look on the

[1] Is. ii. 10. [2] Song of Sol. ii. 14.

pure truth, then the Spouse desires to see it, and to hear also the voice."[1] Thus S. Bernard teaches.

You are convinced, then, of the necessity of meditating on the Life of Christ; for it is evident, according to the authority I have quoted, that unless you are thereby purified, you can never attain to the sublime heights of God. Exercise yourself, then, in this contemplation with watchfulness and assiduousness.

But you must know that there are three kinds of contemplation; that on the Humanity of Christ, on the Heavenly Court, and on the Divine Majesty. You must further bear in mind, that in each of these there are two elevations of soul, the intellectual and the affective. S. Bernard speaks of these in this manner:[2] "There are two raptures in blessed contemplation; one, of the understanding; the other, of the heart; one, of light; the other, of heat; one, in knowledge; the other, in devotion. Truly pious affection; a heart glowing with charity, the outpourings of holy devotion; an earnestness of spirit, charged with zeal—these cannot come forth save from that wine-cellar, 'the banqueting-house[3]' of the Beloved." This, and much else to the same effect, may be gathered from S. Bernard's writings.

CHAPTER LI.

Of Contemplation on the Humanity of Christ.

On this point S. Bernard says, "There are two things to be purified in us; the understanding, and the heart: the understanding, that we may *know;* the heart, that we may

[1] Serm. lxii. in Cant. [2] Serm. xlix. super Cant.
[3] Song of Sol. ii. 4.

will." And again, "The understanding is depressed when it thinks of many objects, when it does not concentrate itself upon a single and distinct theme of meditation, namely, upon that 'City whose foundation is in itself.'" And further on, he says, "The affections, which are influenced by the different passions of the corrupt body, can no way be appeased, I do not say healed, until the will seeks and tends towards one only object." "It is Christ who illumines the understanding; it is Christ who purges the heart. Indeed, the Son of God is come, and has worked so many and so great miracles in the world, that He can of right exact that our minds should be drawn away from the contemplation of the things of the world, and given unceasingly to the contemplation of the marvels which He hath wrought. For verily He has left us most spacious fields for our understanding to roam in, and a torrent of reflections most profound. Who, then, is sufficient to think of all that God hath provided for us, of the way He has come to us, and the help He hath brought: how His Supreme Majesty has willed to die that we may live, to serve us that we may reign, to be exiled that we may be brought back to our country, and to abase Himself to perform the meanest actions, that He may place us over all His works." And again,[1] "Whence shall the light of truth come, in this darkness? Whence shall charity arise, in this evil age, in this world which altogether lieth in wickedness? Who then, think you, shall enlighten our understanding, who shall inflame our hearts? All this shall come to pass, if we will but be turned to Christ, that the veil may be taken away from our hearts."

The same author adds, "'A little bundle of myrrh is my well-beloved unto me; he shall lie betwixt my breasts.' And I, brethren, since the commencement of my conver-

[1] Serm. iii. de Ascens.

sion, for the mass of merits which I stand in need of, place upon my breast this little bundle which I have collected out of all the distresses and bitternesses of my God. Thus I will gather together, first, the necessities of His Infancy, then the labours which He underwent in preaching, His fatigues in journeyings, His watchings in prayer, His temptations in fasting, His tears in compassion, the snares which are laid to entrap Him in His words, His perils amongst false brethren, injuries when spit upon, struck, derided, nailed to the Cross, and all which He endured for the salvation of the human race, which is set forth so copiously in the pages of the Gospel."[1] And further on, again: "To meditate upon these things," I have said, "is true wisdom; in these, is to be found the perfection of righteousness, the fulness of knowledge, the treasures of salvation, abundance of merit. They will provide us from time to time with a drink of wholesome bitterness, a sweet unction of consolation: they will uphold me in adversity, and repress me in prosperity: they will, whilst I walk in the royal way, amid the joys and sorrows of this present life, keep me safe, and protect me on the right hand and on the left from the evils which threaten me. These sufferings conciliate to me the Judge of the world, representing Him who is terrible and powerful, as meek and lowly; portraying Him as not only placable, but friendly and merciful, kind and affectionate, who is unapproachable to princes, and terrible to the kings of the earth. Therefore these sufferings are my constant theme, as you know; they are my constant meditation, as God knows. I have them on my lips, and in my heart, and my pen is ever writing about them; they are, indeed, my most deep and interior philosophy—which is nothing else, but to know 'Jesus and Him crucified.'" This suffices for the contemplation of the Humanity of Jesus, for all this book is upon it.

[1] Serm. xliii. in Cant.

It is not, you must know, a necessity that the Active Life should precede this species of contemplation, because it has to do with corporeal things, the actions of Christ considered as to His Humanity. It is also proposed as more familiar and as more easy not only to the more perfect, but also to beginners; for in it, as in the Active Life, our aim is to purify ourselves from our faults and to acquire virtues; both concur as to this purpose. But when it is laid down, that the Active Life ought to go before the Contemplative, this is true chiefly in its sublimer application, as in the contemplation on the Heavenly Court, and on the Majesty of God, which are reserved for persons of greater spiritual attainment. Therefore, properly speaking, contemplation, when directed to the Humanity of Christ, is more rightly called *meditation* than contemplation. We will now, under the guidance of the same Saint, treat of the other kinds of contemplation.

CHAPTER LII.

Of Contemplation on the Heavenly Court.

Of the contemplation of the Heavenly Court, S. Bernard writes thus:[1] "It is permitted each one of us, during the time of this mortal life, now, indeed, to visit in spirit the Patriarchs, now to salute the Prophets, now to mingle with the assembly of the Apostles, now to take our place amid the choirs of the martyrs; we are able to pass through the ranks and mansions of the heavenly Powers, from the lowest angel to the Cherubim and Seraphim, with all the alacrity of our mind, as devotion may lead us. Where we are most

[1] Serm. lxii. in Cant.

attracted by the inspiration of the Spirit, according to His will, if we stop and knock, immediately it shall be opened unto us." Again,[1] "Blessed is he whose meditation is alway in the Presence of the Lord; whose reflections are continually on the everlasting delights which are at the right hand of the Lord. What can appear to him a trial, who is always occupied with the thought that the sufferings of this present life[2] are not worthy to be compared to future glory? What can he desire in this evil world, whose eye alway sees the good things of the Lord in the land of the living, who ever gazes on eternal rewards?" "Who will grant me, that we may all stand on high, and see the exaltation which is about to come to us from the Lord?" "What can be so good, what else can be so good, as in spirit to roam amongst those glories, which the body is not yet able to attain to?" "Who is there of you, thinking with himself on the future life, its joy, blessedness, sweetness, the glory of the sons of God; who of you, I say, reflecting on these things, with a tranquil conscience, that would not continually through the fulness of inward delight cry out, 'Lord, it is good for us to be here.'[3] The 'here' being not this painful pilgrimage, where we are detained in the body, but the sweet and salutary thought with which the heart is possessed. 'Who will give me wings like a dove, and I will flee away and be at rest?'"[4] "I beseech you, brethren, let not your hearts be burdened with worldly cares; free, I pray you, your hearts from the weight of earthly thoughts." "Construct in your hearts not only tabernacles for Patriarchs and Prophets, but all the mansions of the Heavenly Court; multiply their dwellings, as he did who entered them, offering in the tabernacle of the Lord the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and saying that psalm to the Lord, 'O how

[1] Serm. 4 in Asc. Dom.
[2] Rom. viii. 18.
[3] Matt. xvii. 4.
[4] Ps. lv. 6.

amiable are Thy dwellings, Thou Lord of Hosts; my soul hath a desire and longing to enter into the courts of the Lord.'[1] Go round, brethren, with the sacrifice of piety and devotion; visit in spirit those heavenly and varied abodes which are the mansions in the Father's House, prostrating your hearts before the Throne of God and of the Lamb; reverence, likewise, the orders of the Angels, the number of the Patriarchs, the circle of the Prophets, the assembly of the Apostles; behold the crowns of the martyrs, glowing with purple flowers; admire the choirs of the Virgins, redolent with lilies, and as far as human infirmity will permit, enjoy the mellifluous strains of the 'new song.' 'When I remember these things,' says the Psalmist,[2] 'I pour out my soul in me; for I will go into the place of the wonderful Tabernacle, even to the House of God.'" Thus far S. Bernard, and this is enough on the contemplation of the Heavenly Country.

CHAPTER LIII.

On the Contemplation of the Majesty of God. Also that there are Four Kinds of Contemplation.

Let us approach the more sublime contemplation, which, I believe, but few attain to, the contemplation of the Lord God. Let us hear with respect what S. Bernard says, so being as it were introduced by him, we may make the attempt, if the Lord will graciously permit us thus to draw near to Him. He says, in speaking of the companions of the Spouse, that is, the angels who use those words, "We will make necklets of gold, inlaid with silver,"[3] "Gold is the

[1] Ps. lxxxiv 1. [2] Ps. xlii. 4. V. [3] Song of Sol. i. 11. V.

brightness of Divinity; gold is the wisdom which comes from on high. It is of this gold that the heavenly goldsmiths promise that they will make brilliant ornaments, and insert them in the inner ears of the soul. And I conclude that we must understand thereby, that they will convey to the soul certain spiritual similitudes, and in them most pure intuitions of Divine wisdom, so that the soul may see at least in a mirror, through 'a glass darkly,' that which cannot be now seen face to face. I speak of Divine things, and what is said will be enigmas save to those who have themselves some experience of them; how, for example, whilst still in this mortal body, and in a state of faith, and whilst the interior light is not yet unveiled, nevertheless the contemplation of pure truth is already in some degree experienced in us, at least in part, in such a manner, that he who has this gift from above, is able to apply to his own case the words of the Apostle, 'Now I know in part,'[1] or those, 'We know in part, we prophesy in part.' But when there is within us for a moment a coruscation of the Divine light, our spirit is entranced by a communication of such splendour; soon there follow, I know not how, certain figurative resemblances of inferior things, accommodated to the divinely infused ideas, by the medium of which, the most pure and splendid ray of truth is so tempered as to become more bearable to the mind itself, and more easily communicated to others. It seems to me that these interposing images are formed in us by the suggestions of holy angels; after the same manner, that the evil angels make evil suggestions, of which there is no doubt." And again,[2] "Happy the mind which has learnt to dig deeply in the surrounding wall; but happier he who is on the rock itself. It is permitted, indeed, to dig in the rock, but for this there is need of greater purity of soul, of more ardent

[1] 1 Cor. xiii. 12. [2] Serm. lxii. in Cant.

aims, and the claims of a stronger sanctity. Who, then, is capable of this? Is not he, forsooth, who said, 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God'?[1] Does it not seem that the writer is immersed in the deep recesses of the Word, and that, from the secret sanctuary of the heart of his Master, he was drawing forth the marrow of divine wisdom?" And again, "The more laboriously one digs in the rock, the more sweet will be that which we draw from it. Do not fear, because Scripture threatens the explorers of His Majesty; bring with you a pure and single eye, you shall not be overwhelmed by His glory, but admitted to it, that is, if you seek the glory of God, and not your own. If any one is oppressed, it is by his own glory, not God's. If you are weighed down by the first, it is not possible to raise your head to the second, however much you may wish it. Disburden yourself, then, and dig with safety into the rock, where you will find hidden treasures of wisdom and knowledge. What if you hesitate still, hear the rock itself: 'Those who labour with me shall not err,' 'Who will give me wings like a dove, and I will flee away and be at rest.' There the meek and simple find rest, where the deceitful, the proud, the envious of vainglory, are overwhelmed." And further on, "He is not overwhelmed, who is the explorer, not of the Divine Majesty, but of the Divine Will. And if sometimes he does venture to regard the Divine Majesty, it is not as a curious explorer, but as an admirer. But if in rapt contemplation he is drawn towards it, this is the finger of the Lord, which mercifully elevates him; not the temerity of man insolently approaching the deep things of God. Since, then, the Apostle relates his rapture, to excuse himself of presumption, what other mortal would dare to

[1] S. John i. 1.

enter, in his own strength, upon a scrutiny of the Divine Majesty, and would not fear to draw near to Divine secrets in an importunate manner? The explorers of the Divine Majesty, I call invaders of God; they are not those who are rapt, but those who rush upon Him. These, therefore, are overwhelmed by His glory. To explore His Majesty is a formidable act; to explore His Will, is both pious and safe. Why, then, should I not with all diligence search into the secret of His glorious Will, which I have always to obey? Soft is that glory which emanates from the contemplation of His Sweetness, and from gazing upon the riches of His Goodness and Mercy. Indeed, 'we have seen His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father;'[1] that is, all that has appeared of this glory is full of sweetness and paternal love. This glory will not oppress me, though with all my powers I contemplate it; I rather should be impressed by it. For when we with open face behold it, we are transformed into the same image as that upon which we fix our gaze. Far be from me, that man should dare to seek conformity with God in the glory of His Majesty, and not in meekness of will. My glory would be, that the words may be said of me, 'I have found . . . a man after mine own heart.'[2] The heart of the Spouse, is the Father's heart. As the Lord said, 'Be ye merciful, as your Father which is in Heaven is merciful.[3] This is the resemblance which He desired to see in His Church, when He said, 'Show Me thy countenance,'[4] that is, the expression of thy piety and meekness. He can raise his face with confidence towards the Rock, who resembles it. 'Draw near,' He says to him, 'and be enlightened, and your faces shall not be ashamed.'[5] How should the humble be confounded by

[1] S. John i. 14. [2] Acts xiii. 22. [3] S. Luke vi. 36.
[4] Song of Sol. ii. 14. [5] Ps. xxxiv. 5.

the humble; the pious, by the holy; the meek, by the gentle. The pure countenance of the Spouse would plainly not be abhorred by the purity of the Rock, any more than light would be abhorred by light, virtue by virtue.

"These two sisters, Mary and Martha, signify two kinds of lives of the lovers of poverty. Some, with Martha, are anxious to prepare two viands for our Lord; namely, the correction of works by the seasoning of contrition; and works of piety with the condiment of devotion. But those who with Mary are occupied with God Himself alone, wish to contemplate what God is in the world, what in man, what He is in angels, what in Himself, what in the reprobate; how He is the Ruler and Governor of the world, the Liberator and Helper of men, the Sweetness and Beauty of angels, in Himself Beginning and End, the terror and dread of the reprobate; in creation, wonderful; in man, lovable; in angels, desirable; in Himself, incomprehensible; in the reprobate, intolerable." So S. Bernard.

Further, in this contemplation of the majesty of God, there are four modes, of which S. Bernard thus speaks: "There are four kinds of contemplation: the first and highest is the admiration of Majesty. This requires a pure heart, freed from vice and from the burden of sin, which is more easily raised towards Heavenly things, and sometimes for a few moments held in a state of rapture and in an ecstasy of admiration. The second, which is necessary to the first, is the contemplation of Divine Judgments. A view of these strikes the beholder with fear, puts to flight vices, causes virtues to germinate, leads to wisdom, preserves humility."[1] And again, "A third kind of contemplation is engaged upon, or rather rests in the memory of past blessings, lest the soul become ungrateful, and the love of the Benefactor be not sufficiently regarded. The fourth forgets the things which

[1] De Consid., v. 14.

are behind, rests only in the expectation of promises, which, as it is a meditation on that which is eternal, nourishes patience, and gives vigour to perseverance." Thus far S. Bernard, and here ends what we have to say on the contemplation of the Majesty of God.

CHAPTER LIV.

Of the Manner of living the Active Life. The Excellent Teaching of S. Bernard thereon.

After examining the exercises of the first part of the Active Life, and of the Contemplative Life and its different modes, it remains for us to see how we may best enter upon the former, with ease and effectually. You must know that the first part of the Active Life requires association with others, in the same way as the Contemplative demands solitude. In the Active Life, by living in constant contact with others, we shall arrive better and quicker to the end which it proposes. The presence of others makes us ashamed because of the vices we have, and because of the virtues we have not; and, therefore, we seek to amend in both respects. This does not take place in solitude, when there is no one to reprove us, and before whom we are ashamed to transgress. Also, we profit much from the rebukes as well as from the examples of others in whose company we are: we are led to avoid what is displeasing in them and condemned, and to acquire what is agreeable and commended. Thus must you act in this life: you must diligently observe and avoid your own faults and those of others, according as you have been already taught in many places, especially in the chapter on the Active Life. Consider well what is there said about

vices and virtues, and bring yourself to practise what is taught; see how you should examine yourself, and observe the virtues of others, also imitate them, and humble yourself and preserve a spirit of fear before God, when you discover your own defects in regard to them. Thus S. Bernard teaches: "It is not without cause that for two or three days a languor of soul has attacked me, and an unusual dulness of mind and a sort of lassitude of spirit has taken hold upon me. I did run with alacrity, and lo! a stone of stumbling lay in my path; I was hurt, and I fell. Pride was found in me, and the Lord turned away in anger from His servant. Hence came this sterility of soul, this meagreness of devotion which I experienced. How was my heart dried up, as curdled milk, as land in drought; nor could I shed one tear of compunction, my heart was so hard. I found no comfort in meditation. Where now is that rapt delight which once I felt? Where is that repose of soul? that peace and joy in the Holy Ghost? I work without diligence: in watches, sleepy; to wrath, prone; in hatred, persevering; in speech and at table, less restrained; to minister to others, slow and disinclined. Alas! all the mountains in turn the Lord visited, but He did not approach my dwelling."[1] Again, "I see one remarkable for abstinence; one, for a marvellous patience; another, for a consummate lowliness; another, for perfect meekness; another, abounding in mercifulness and piety; this one, frequently gifted with the power of contemplation; this one, sticking at and piercing through the heavens with fervent prayers—all these are conspicuous for their virtues. I look around me and see the fervent, the devout, all united in Christ, all with a wealth of heavenly gifts and graces: truly are they the mountains which the Lord has visited, and who receive the Spouse again and again 'leaping upon'[2] them. But I, who find none of all this in me, what

[1] Serm. liv. in Cant. [2] Song of Sol. ii. 8.

shall I think of myself but as one of the mountains of Gilboa, which the most benign Visitor of all the others passes by in anger and indignation? My little children, such a thought as this takes away the proud look, invites grace, and prepares the way for the coming of the Spouse." And, further on, "I wish that you would not spare yourself, but accuse yourself, whenever you find yourself in the wrong, and perceive grace to be a little weaker, and virtue to be failing." And again, "It is the duty of a man to examine himself, both as to his inner and outer life, and to be watchful over his ways and inclinations, and to suspect that pride is in all that he does, lest he be ensnared. 'Blessed is the man who feareth always.'" "Learn to have yourself well in hand, to order your life, to rule your manners, to judge yourself, to arraign yourself before yourself, often to condemn yourself, and never to let yourself off with impunity. Let justice occupy the seat of judgment, let the guilty stand before it, and let conscience accuse yourself. No one loves himself more, no one will judge himself more faithfully. In the morning exact from yourself an account of the night, and see what precautions you should take for the coming day. When night has come, exact the account of the day, and make resolutions for the coming night. If you thus are strict with yourself, there will be no time for wantonness. Live every hour according to your rule of life, taking spiritual duties and temporal, each at their right time, thus rendering to God the service of your spirit, and to your spirit the service of your body. If anything should be omitted, or imperfectly performed, either as to manner, place, or time, do not let it pass with impunity, but strive to make it up."[1] "How I revere them with my heart, how, think you, do I admire them, how do I embrace them with the affection of charity, who live day by day amongst others without offence, and who,

[1] Ep. de Vit. Sol.

choosing one or another for companionship, select those who are more fervent than the rest, and set them before them as examples, as models of the fulfilment of their duty, bodily and spiritual, to their Lord! Alas, me! says one of us, for I have observed a religious person, in watching and prayer, in whom I could discover thirty virtues, whilst I perhaps can find only one in myself! He had everything which the humility of religious emulation gives. Here is the fruit to draw from my discourse, that every one should always seek that which is highest in others, for in that consists the fulness of humility. If in some respect a grace seems to be given to you in larger proportion than to some other, you can, nevertheless, if you are animated with the true feeling of emulation, you can yet judge yourself inferior to him in other points. Thus you may be able to practise more mortification, or to labour more than another; but he may surpass you in patience, excel you in humility, be more eminent in charity. How, then, daily do you yield to the foolish and self-complacent thought, that you are better than he? Be a little more anxious to discover in what you fail, what is wanting to you. This would be more profitable."[1] At least, S. Bernard evidently thinks so.

You see, then, how important it is to be circumspect, and to examine yourself, and others also, but only that you may turn to account their example. Give diligence to this, whilst you are in the Active Life, always guarding the duties of humility, charity, and piety. Above all, occupy yourself with meditations upon the Life of Christ, and prayer; because by means of both, you will be enlightened as to vices and virtues, and you will be helped by these more than by all other exercises in gaining purity of soul, towards which with all your strength you ought to tend, for it includes all virtues, as I have shown, when treating of the Fast of our Lord.

[1] Serm. de Alt. Cordis.

If you have well understood the authorities which I have cited on this subject, you will not fail to grasp the truth, that the higher the contemplation you desire to attain to, the greater must be the purity of soul by which you fortify yourself. But the soul is purified by meditating on the Life of Christ, and especially upon His Passion, as you have seen from S. Bernard's general observations in the seventy-second sermon on the Song of Songs. The soul is purified also in Prayer, which is near to and a preparation for Contemplation, and that which prayer obtains by laborious exertion, contemplation tastes in sweet repose. We have now dealt with the Active Life enough.

CHAPTER LV.

Of the Manner of living the Contemplative Life.

Otherwise, far otherwise, must the Contemplative Life be lived. In it, the life is lived with God alone, and in solitude of spirit, of which I have spoken on the subject of our Lord's Fast. Neither the concerns of others nor our own temporal affairs should occupy us, or draw us away from our sole employment, from thought, devotion, and tenderness. Nothing of oneself is to remain; we must cast behind our back everything, as if we were unconscious or dead, in order to spend our time with God alone, unless necessity, in spite of ourselves, should oblige us to forego devotion. To be well instructed as to this wisdom in repose, as you have before seen in S. Bernard's fortieth sermon on the Song of Solomon, it behoves you to lessen activity; and to remain silent, after the example of Mary, as much as possible, and as far as right, even when spoken to, as she left her Lord to speak and to

reply, and committed all to His most gracious providence. Upon this hear S. Bernard, speaking with his usual eloquence: "Martha, whilst she acted, represented the form of the Active Life. Mary, however, depicted the Contemplative Life, as she sat and remained silent and motionless, listening only with all her power to the word of God; thus loving the grace of Divine knowledge, she drank it in from its Source, despising all else. Without, she is as one unconscious; within, she is thrilled with the ineffable delight of contemplating God." "Do not marvel, if he who toils and works hard, murmurs at one who rests in contemplation, because this took place in the Gospel, between Martha and Mary. Martha murmured against Mary, because she was cumbered about much serving, and her sister did not come to help her. Neither could the two be combined—the cares of external service, and the desires of interior wisdom. For it is written of wisdom itself, that 'it cometh by opportunity of leisure.'[1] It is therefore that Mary sat and remained motionless, and wills not to interrupt the repose of her silence, for fear of losing the sweet delights of contemplation, especially whilst she heard Jesus saying to her in spirit, Rest, and see how gracious the Lord is.'"[2] Again, "Do you think in the house where Christ enters, murmuring should be heard? Happy home, and blessed society, where Martha complains of Mary. For that Mary should emulate Martha would not be fitting and right. For thus would she have complained that her sister had left her to serve the Lord alone? No. No. She who is occupied with God, has no thought to give to the inquietudes and occupations of others! Martha does not seem sufficient for her work, and, less capable herself, wishes to divide it with others. Regard, on the other hand, the prerogative of Mary, who in all her cause has some one to take her part. The Pharisee

[1] Eccl. xxxviii. 24. [2] Ps. xxxiv. 8.

is indignant, the sister complains, the disciples themselves murmur. She is all the while silent, and Jesus replies on her behalf."[1] And further, "See how Mary tastes and sees how gracious the Lord is, how she, with devout heart and calm soul, sits at Jesus' feet, regarding Him and listening to every word which flows from His lips, whose tenderness is deep, whose words are full of grace, whose beauty is more than the sons of men, nay, almost the beauty of angel-worlds. Rejoice and give thanks, Mary, for you have chosen the good part! Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see, and the ears that are worthy of hearing the things that ye hear! Blessed ye who listen for the faintest whispers of the Divine voice in stillness and silence, for it is good for a man to wait upon the Lord! Be simple; not only be without guile, but without a multiplicity of distracting occupations, so that you may enjoy communion with Him, whose Voice is sweet, and His Countenance lovely. Beware, however, of one thing, lest you begin to grow self-satisfied on account of this sweetness, and to think more of yourself than you ought, lest, whilst following after light, you encounter darkness, through the illusions of that sickness that destroyeth at noonday—the pride of the devil."

You have now learnt, that for a man to lead a life of contemplation, he has to abandon other occupations, and manual labour, because occupation is opposed to rest, and is one of its great hindrances. Much business is hurtful in many ways, not only during the actual occupation, but also afterwards; it fills the mind with anxiety and solitude as to what has been, or is to be done, and leaves its impress on our inner being which we cannot shake off, and therefore care and contemplation cannot co-exist.

[1] Serm. iii. de Assump. Virg.

CHAPTER LVI.

Of Four Obstacles to Contemplation.

Now let us consider what are the hindrances to contemplation. There are four, of which S. Bernard thus speaks: "If it happens to any one to be drawn into the secret of contemplation, into this sanctuary of God; if he has the blessedness of being hidden therein, where no voice comes, no trouble, no disturbance from without, no anxious cares, no sad remorse, or what is still more difficult, no distracting images of earthly things; then, when he returns to himself, he may glory and say, 'The King brought me to His inner court.'"[1] Thus S. Bernard.

The first obstacle is, then, the pain of the body. The soul is so closely bound to the flesh, that it cannot enter into and enjoy the delights of contemplation, when any part of the body is in pain. Thus, without a very special grace from God, the time of sickness is not the time of contemplation. It is the same if hunger, thirst, cold, or any other bodily need or suffering is keenly felt.

The second obstacle is gnawing care, anxiety as to needs and occupations; this is sufficiently demonstrated by the authorities which have been already quoted. The same writer says, enumerating elsewhere the hindrances to contemplation, that "as dust, cast into the eye, hinders us from seeing, so the anxieties of earthly cares trouble the eye of the soul, and prevent it from contemplating the true light."

The third obstacle is sad remorse; that is, the consciousness of sin. And this may happen in two ways: first, when sin is actually present in the soul; secondly, when the sin

[1] Serm. xxii. in Cant.

has been repented of and forgiven, but yet comes to remembrance. In either way contemplation is impeded, as S. Bernard declares, when he says, "As darkness hinders our corporeal vision; so sin, when it is in the soul, obstructs the spiritual life, for the soul is overshadowed with darkness, and contemplation requires that the soul be in a state of purity and clearness. Likewise, as blood or any humour, if it gets into the eye, injures the sight; so sin, when it comes into the memory, flows into the soul and hinders its vision, and therefore the memory of past sins is to be avoided in the time of contemplation. Doubtless we ought at all times to regard ourselves as sinners; but we ought not, during contemplation, to fix our attention upon one of or upon all our faults." Thus S. Bernard says, "Those who fairly represent Mary to us are those who have, by lapse of time and with the aid of Divine grace, made considerable progress in the spiritual life, and who now can commit themselves to Divine Indulgence, so as not to render themselves unquiet by the sad images of past sins, but who can joyously and safely meditate day and night on the law of God. Sometimes even with open face they behold the glory of the Spouse, and are perfectly transformed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord."[1] Thus far S. Bernard.

The fourth obstacle he describes as the phantoms of corporeal images. This last is more difficult to be overcome than the others, and therefore solitude is especially recommended in contemplation. It behoveth the man who contemplates to be in some sense dumb, deaf, and blind, so that seeing he may not see, and hearing he may not hear, nor take delight in talking; that is, that he may be so withdrawn from transitory things, and so united to God, that he may not, by hearing, seeing, speaking, cease to contemplate,

[1] Serm. lvii. in Cant.

but that he may avoid interruption as much as possible. And if necessity obliges him to break off, he must not lay up in the soul those images of things which have passed through its windows. Consequently, it is not the duty of one who lives the Contemplative Life, as though he led the Active Life, to observe the conduct of his neighbours, lest he should store up causes of distractions. Much more careful should he be to abstain from conversation with worldly persons, as I have often taught. If, however, obedience, necessity, politeness, or recreation require him to do some work or action, let him do it with fidelity; but let him not cleave to it with his will, nor take such pleasure in it that he cannot afterwards shake off the images of it, and peacefully hold communion with God. Concerning this S. Bernard says, "We must do manual labour, not so much that by delight the soul should be detained thereby, but that all its delight may be reserved for spiritual exercises; a pause which is not for the purpose of dissipating the mind, but to refresh it. Whence the soul should be able to return to devotion without hindrance, and without any conflict, without resistance of will, without having contracted any pleasure, or retained any image on the memory. As man was not made for woman, but woman for man; so neither were spiritual exercises made for bodily, but bodily for spiritual. Moreover, to man, when first created, there was made a help like unto himself, drawn from his own substance; so the help of bodily exercise is necessary for spiritual exercise; not, however, is there always the same likeness and affinity between them: as, for instance, between meditating on what is written and writing what is read. However, labour in the open air exhausts the mind oftentimes, when, by a too violent and rude exertion, the body is greatly reduced and broken, even to contrition or humility of heart. For the pain of fatigue often is the test of a more vehement devotion. Never-

theless a good and prudent servant will do all, whether labour or devotion, in right proportion; nor will he be dissipated in work, but will be gathered up into himself, because he will have always before his eyes, not so much what he does as his intention in doing it, and will direct all his actions to the last end."[1] Thus S. Bernard. You see with what care it behoves him to act, lest through manual labour he should allow his mind to become distracted. I know, indeed, what an impediment to contemplation you experience when you allow the mind to be the prey of anxious cares. This will suffice concerning the obstacles of contemplation.

From all which has gone before, you can judge how hurtful is that eager curiosity which infects the whole soul, rendering it unquiet and impure. How harmful, too, are cupidity and avarice; and how, on the contrary, precious is that poverty which can present the soul ever free and pure before God.

For the rest, be not disturbed, because I have said the contemplative do not give their thoughts to their neighbours; for such think more of God, and surpass the man of action in the love of God. But the active surpass him, again, in the love of their neighbour. S. Bernard expresses himself thus on this subject: "I say, by the grace of God which is in us, that we have vines and fig trees. The fig trees are those who are most sweet in manners: the vines are those who are most fervent in heart. Whoever lives sociably with us, not only avoids disputes in conversation, but endeavours to make himself pleasant by kind offices, is he not most aptly represented by the fig tree?"[2] Again, "Those are the vines who are more severe than complaisant, who are vehement of spirit, sticklers for discipline, declaimers against vice, and who can truly apply to themselves the

[1] Ep. de Vit. Sol. [2] Serm. lx. in Cant.

Psalmist's words, 'Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee, and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee?'[1] And, 'The zeal of Thine house hath even consumed me.'[2] One shines most with the love of his neighbour, the other with the love of God." Thus S. Bernard. You see, then, in the matter of zeal for God, the Contemplative are said to outstrip the Active. Understand this, however, discreetly: for the contemplative never omits the love of his neighbour; only he loves God principally, and his neighbour secondarily, within a certain limit. It is the duty of a new beginner to occupy himself as far as possible with God alone, to remain in solitude of spirit, and to be alone, so as even to appear to neglect the active service of God, of himself, and of his neighbour; since the nature of solitude demands this, especially when he is favoured with a visit from the Spouse; otherwise he may easily become distracted. But when he has become accustomed to the long exercises of contemplative prayer, then will he be filled with a burning zeal for God and for the salvation of souls, as we have before seen in the eighteenth sermon of S. Bernard on the Song of Solomon, in which is described the way the Contemplative precedes the second part of the Active Life. But more than this, in a case of urgent necessity, even the tyro will intermit his spiritual exercises for the benefit of his neighbours. Thus S. Bernard says, "When a man prays, who doubts but that he speaks to God? Yet how often, charity bidding, are we to be drawn away and torn away from God for the sake of any who may need our assistance or advice? How often is the pious rest in God to yield to the tumult of business? How often, with a good conscience, must the book be laid aside for manual toil? How often, for the administration of earthly matters, may we justly omit celebration? The order is reversed; but necessity has no law." Thus S. Bernard.

[1] Ps. cxxxix. 21. [2] Ps. lxix. 9.

CHAPTER LVII.

The Contemplative is preferred to the Active Life.

SEEING that S. Bernard, in Sermon LX. on the Song of Solomon, has, as we have already pointed out, stated that the Contemplative outstrips the Active Life in the love of God, it is evident that the Contemplative, on the whole, is represented as a more excellent life. Thus the same Saint says,[1] "What does it mean, brethren, that it is said, Mary chose the better part? Where are the charges which we are prone to bring against her, if perhaps all the while she willed only to condemn, as beyond the occasion, the anxieties of Martha? Better is the churlishness of a man than a courteous woman. What becomes, then, of that saying, 'If any man serve Me, him will My Father honour'?[2] And again, 'Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister.'[3] In short, what comfort remains for the active sister, if we exalt the part of Mary, so as to take away all credit from her? One of these two ways we must solve the difficulty. Mary's choice is to be praised, because her part ought to be chosen by all, as far as possible; or else we ought to find no fault in either, but remember that each in her vocation did the will of her Master. As David, who, going out and coming in, was ready to obey the orders of the King, cried out, 'My heart is ready, my heart is ready.' He made use of the expression twice, implying that his heart was ready for God, and for his neighbour's service. That plainly is the best part which cannot be taken away; that plainly is the best

[1] Serm. iii. de Assump. B. V. M.

[2] S. John xii. 26. [3] S. Matt xx. 26.

state which suffers no change, and is ready for every call. But he also performs a good part who labours in active service well; and if his part is better who only waits upon God, yet his is best who unites both perfectly. However, I will add one observation, if, indeed, such a thing could for a moment be suspected in Martha. Does she not, in asking her sister to help her, seem to charge her with neglect? But the carnal man perceiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, if indeed he charges with idleness those who wait upon God. Let him hear that it is the best part, and abideth for ever. Does it not seem somewhat impertinent that those unpractised in the art of contemplation, should thus venture upon a region where the one thing needful is this occupation—this the one aim and the one life?"

Further, "Two things are required in the intention, which we have called the countenance of the soul—the object, and the cause; in other words, the purpose you have in view, and the reason for having it. By these two, the beauty or foulness of the soul may be easily discerned."[1] Again, "To apply ourselves to something else besides God, and yet, nevertheless, through it to act for God, is the work of Martha, not of Mary. Far be it from me to blame the soul that acts thus. Yet I do not affirm that the soul which thus labours has arrived at the perfection of beauty. Such a soul is anxious and troubled about many things, and cannot but be soiled with the dust of earthly occupations. But that which removes the stain easily and quickly is the hour's contemplation before God, the chaste intention and the answer of a good conscience before Him. But to seek God only for the sake of Himself alone, this is to have both cheeks fair, to have both things required for a pure intention, to have the proper and distinctive mark

[1] Serm. xl. in Cant.

of the spouse, who can by a singular prerogative apply these words, 'Thy cheeks are comely with rows of jewels.' [1]

"Solitude and seclusion are names of misery; but our place of seclusion should not be one of constraint, but a dwelling-place of peace; the closed door, not that of a prison, but of a happy retreat. He who lives in communion with God, is never less alone than when alone. It is then, in effect, that he is able freely to enjoy his happiness. When he is alone, he can enjoy God in himself, and himself in God. Then in the light of truth, in the clear serenity of a clean heart, the pure conscience will freely open itself before Him, the memory will be filled with the thought of God, the understanding will be illumined, the heart will dilate itself with the enjoyment of the supreme good, so that human frailty will freely weep over its faults. This is the object of this vocation, not to be confined on earth, but to dwell in Heaven—the world ever excluded, that you may be, as it were, enclosed in God." "It is not idleness to rest in God; it is the business of all businesses." Thus S. Bernard.

By these quotations it will be seen that the Contemplative Life is considered superior to the Active: you have elsewhere other authorities on this subject which tend to the same view in this treatise, and especially in the chapter on the way our Lord fled from the multitude when they would have made Him a king, and from the thirty-second sermon of S. Bernard on the Song of Songs.

But which of these two kinds of life has the more worth? God knows. Believe, however, that those who have the greater love have the greater reward; but in the Contemplative Life it seems that the love of God preponderates. Its greatness consists in beholding God, enjoying God, conversing with God, knowing His will—all this appertains

[1] Song of Sol. i. 10.

to the man of contemplation. The Contemplative Life is, indeed, a sort of foretaste of the Reward of our Eternal Country, however imperfectly or rarely this is realized. And as this, the Saints seem to have regarded it, and to have given it the higher place. But what does our Lord will concerning both these kinds of life. That as in one body there are many members, and all have not the same office, so we may serve God in His Church in divers manners; the same Spirit is not given to all, "for to one is given the word of wisdom,"[1] etc. Let each one, then, remain in that vocation in which he was called: he that is fitted for contemplation, let him remain in it; and he who devotes himself to the service of others, let him abide in it. For the Lord, as He had said of Mary, that she had chosen the better part, so did He enjoin upon S. Peter, after the third time He had questioned his love for Him, that he should feed His sheep. And it is in this sense that S. Bernard is to be understood, when he says, "that Martha received the Lord into her house, because to her was entrusted the management of the house. Let all other helpers receive Christ according to the kind of ministry which they exercise; let them receive Christ, serve Christ, minister to Him in His members. This one, in sick brethren; that one, in the poor; this one, in exercising hospitality towards guests and strangers: and all the while they are thus occupied in their various services, let Mary wait upon the Lord in stillness, seeing and tasting how sweet the Lord is." Thus S. Bernard.[2]

You, then, if your state of life demand it, embrace with all your strength the Contemplative Life; but let the Active Life precede it, and conduct you to it. Rejoice and give thanks to the Lord Jesus, you who are called to that part, which He calls the best.

[1] 1 Cor. xii. 8.

[2] Serm. iii. de Assump. B. V. M.

CHAPTER LVIII.

Of Three Causes, on account of which one ought to return from the Contemplative into the Active Life. Also how Faith without Works is dead.

ALTHOUGH it has been several times touched upon, that in contemplation nothing should be sought but to wait upon God, and all else should be set aside, it must be remembered that this holds good only generally, but not always. For there are three reasons for which the sweet repose of contemplation should be for a time abandoned, and the Active Life entered upon.

The first cause is the good of souls, as you have seen above, in the chapter entitled "How the Contemplative Life precedes the Active," from the eighteenth and sixty-second sermons of S. Bernard on the Canticles. S. Bernard says also, "'Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.'[1] The Spouse testifies His great affection by the repetition of those terms of affection; for such repetition is a mark of love. And that He again calls the beloved to labour in the vineyard, shows His great anxiety for the salvation of souls. For the vines, you must know, are the souls." And further on, "Yet, if I mistake not, I have not yet once named the Bride, but now, when she is to go to the vines, that they may produce the wine of charity." Thus S. Bernard. The Bride, knowing the will of the Bridegroom, who is glowing with zeal for souls, goes forth at the time when there is need to labour, and afterwards returns to contemplation.

[1] Serm. lxii. sup. Cant.

Another reason for interrupting contemplation, is some pressing duty. Thus, some one has to see to those under his charge, and therefore omits it. On this point S. Bernard says, speaking of his monks who tormented him by continual interruptions, "Rarely do I get an hour's peace, because of their continual applications." "I lay aside my devotion, lest I should give the appearance of impatience to the weak, for they are the Lord's little ones who believe in Him, and I would not allow them to take offence from me. I may not use this power, but rather let them use me as it pleases them, if only they may be saved. They will spare me, if they have not spared me; and I shall repose in the thought that they have not feared to disturb me for their necessities. I will do all I can for them, and in them I will serve my God, continuing to do so with charity unfeigned. I will not seek my own, nor will I consider what is profitable for myself. This only will I ask, that my service may be acceptable and fruitful, if haply I may thus be able in the evil day to find mercy before the eyes of their Father." He says further, what bears upon both these causes of interruption, "I speak to you of my own experience; if I have found that my advice is of service to any one, I have always been ready to forego my own rest and quiet. Thus, for instance, when, after speaking, I find the angry become meek, the proud humble, the weak brave; or else, those already meek, humble, and strong make progress in their respective graces, and become conscious of some improvement; or if those who are perhaps lukewarm and dull about Divine things, are re-quickened by the fire of the Divine Word, and seem to wake out of their sleep; or if those, who have deserted the fountain of wisdom, and hewn out for themselves cisterns of self-will which can hold no water, murmuring at every injunction, and complaining that the springs of devotion are dried up within their hearts, are brought back to the

Fount again; if those, I say, prove that they have been refreshed by the dew of the Divine Word and by the gracious rain which God hath poured upon His inheritance, by becoming obedient and devout in all things: in such instances, I have never regretted interrupting the joy of contemplation. When I have found myself surrounded with such flowers and fruits of piety, I permitted myself patiently to be drawn from the embrace, as it were, of the sterile Rachel, to gather abundant fruits from Leah in the spiritual advancement of others. No, indeed, I regret not giving up my own delight and repose, to speak to others, when I see seed which I have sown germinate in them, or the fruits of righteousness increase. For 'charity seeketh not her own,'[1] and thus persuades me easily to prefer the benefit of others to the gratification of my own desires. To pray, read, write, meditate, and all the other benefits of spiritual exercises, I have counted them all but loss on accountof you."[2] Thus S. Bernard.

The third reason for leaving contemplation is, when the soul, through the withdrawal of the Spouse (no unwonted experience), perceives no longer its accustomed consolations. For the Spouse goes and comes as He will, as you have learnt from Chapter XXXV., entitled "How the Lord withdrew, when the Multitude wanted to make Him a King." When, then, He retires, the soul languishes with desire, and recalls Him with all her might, as the spouse in the Canticles: "Return, return, my well-beloved." And when He does not at once return, she calls His companions, that is, the angels, and says, "I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my beloved, that ye tell Him that I am sick of love."[3] If He does not deign to return, the soul, knowing thereby the will of the Spouse, returns to active employment, thus to produce fruits for the Spouse.

[1] 1 Cor. xiii. 5. [2] Serm. li. in Cant. [3] Song of Sol. v. 8.

The man of contemplation knows not idleness. Thus the spouse says, "Stay me with flowers, compass me with apples, for I languish with love." Concerning this, S. Bernard says,[1] "The flower is faith, the fruit is good works. You observe the order is true to the similitude: faith precedes works, as flowers go before fruits. 'Without faith, it is impossible to please God,'[2] according to the testimony of S. Paul; and further, 'Whatsoever is not of faith, is sin.'[3] Thus no fruit without the flower, no good work without faith; 'faith,' on the other hand, 'without works is dead,'[4] like unto the useless flower which bears no fruit. Therefore, of good works, faith unfeigned is the root; and the soul, accustomed to contemplation, will receive consolation, as often as the light of contemplation is for the time withdrawn. Who is there, I will not say continually, but even for a long time, during this life in the body, enjoys the light of contemplation? But, as I have said, as often as any one falls from contemplation, he should betake himself to the Active Life; for the two are not far apart, they are companions, nay, sisters, living in the same dwelling, like Martha and Mary. Moreover, if one falls from the brightness of contemplation, one must not suffer oneself to roll over into the darkness of sin or the idleness of sloth; but we must remain in the light of good works, for you know good works have also a light. 'Let your light' (says our Lord) 'shine before men;' that is, the light of the good works which they behold in you." Thus far S. Bernard.

Here, then, are the three reasons for which the sweetness of contemplation should be left, and the Active Life resumed, altogether against the choice of the Contemplative, but in accordance with the dispensation of God. And you have to remark, that contemplation must only be omitted

[1] Serm. li. in Cant.
[2] Heb. xi. 6.
[3] Rom. xiv. 23.
[4] S. James ii. 26.

for a time, and be returned to again. This is a further evidence that the Contemplative excels the Active Life.

Well, then, thanks be to God! We have concluded this treatise on Contemplation. It is a matter of some length, but very useful; and you can draw from it many other lessons on the exercises of the spiritual life in general. Therefore read it diligently, and try to accomplish faithfully what is prescribed; and remember that the teaching in this treatise is not mine, but S. Bernard's. What I have said will be sufficient for your purpose

CHAPTER LIX.

How the Lord said to the Jews that the Church should pass to the Gentiles, and depicted this by the Parable of the Husbandmen in the Vineyard who killed the Son of their Lord.[1]

Our Lord and Redeemer, zealous for the salvation of souls, for whom He had come to lay down His life, sought by every means to draw them to Himself and to rescue them from the jaws of the enemy. Wherefore sometimes He used bland and lowly words, sometimes words of reproof and severity; sometimes examples and parables; sometimes threats and terrors: He varied his methods and remedies of salvation according to place, time, and audience. Thus, against the rulers and Pharisees He employed stern words, and a terrible example, though one just and true, that left them no escape. He proposes to them a parable of husbandmen in a vineyard, who killed the messengers of their Lord, who came to receive the fruits; and afterwards

[1] S. Matt. xxi. 33–43.

they killed His Son. Then He asked, what punishment they deserved to receive from their master? They replied, "He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out His vineyard to other husbandmen." Jesus, approving their answer, thus applied it: "The kingdom of God, that is, the Church, shall be taken away from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof;" that is, to the Gentiles, of whom we are, and the universal Church. Moreover, He introduced the similitude of a corner-stone, which signified Himself, and which should grind the Jews to powder. And then they understood that the parable pointed to them, and the effect was, not their correction, but their increased anger, for their "malice had blinded them." Behold, then, Christ, in this scene, humbly indeed sitting amongst these Pharisees, but speaking with authority and power, and in the power of His might telling them of their own fate.

CHAPTER LX.

How they sought to entrap Jesus in His Words.

As in many ways the Lord Jesus endeavoured to effect the salvation of the Jews, so on the other hand they in many ways sought to slander and destroy Him. They thought to deceive Him, but the "searchers failed in their search."[1] Then they planned to send their disciples with the Herodians, to find out whether it was lawful to give tribute to Cæsar, or not?[2] For they thought by this means they would make him odious, either to Cæsar, or to the people of the Jews; because either way His answer would condemn Himself. But the Discerner of hearts, knowing their wickedness, replied, that they should "render to Cæsar the things of

[1] Ps. lxiv. 5, 6. V. [2] S. Matt. xxii. 16.

Cæsar, and unto God the things of God;" and called them hypocrites, because their words were fair, but their heart was deceitful. They, therefore, frustrated in their purpose, withdrew ashamed. Regard our Lord attentively, as we have before advised; consider the teaching, that it is not His will that persons in authority should be defrauded of their temporal rights. Wherefore it is a sin, and forbidden, not to pay rates, taxes, or dues of any kind which are rightly levied by the temporal powers.

CHAPTER LXI.

Of the Blind Man at Jericho, and many other Things.

Our most gracious Lord, Who, out of the excess of His charity, came down from the Father's Bosom for our salvation, knowing that the time of His Passion was at hand, prepared Himself for it by going up to Jerusalem, where He was to suffer it. At that time, by His Divinity, He predicted it; but He was not understood. When, then, He drew near to Jericho, a certain blind man,[1] who sat and begged by the wayside, who was told by the crowd that Jesus was passing by, began to cry out loudly for mercy; and, although he was rebuked by the crowd, he was not abashed and would not hold his peace. To his faith and fervour the Lord Jesus gave heed, and commanded him to be led to Him, and said to him, "What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?" O most sweet utterance! "What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?" And the blind man said, "Lord, that I may receive my sight." And the merciful

[1] S. Luke xviii. 35.

Lord granted his petition, saying, "Receive thy sight." And He healed him. Contemplate the Lord Jesus as He thus acted, and dwell upon His graciousness.

Give your thoughts also, in this place, to the power of faith and of prayer, and how importunity in prayer does not displease God; on the contrary, He delights in it, as you have seen in the case of the woman of Canaan. And in this place Christ teaches that "men ought always to pray and not to faint,"[1] illustrating this truth by the conduct of a judge from whom a widow obtained her request through importunity. Elsewhere He gives another instance, in the case of one who granted loaves[2] at night through the importunity of the petitioner. Then, to those who persevere in prayer, our Lord grants their petitions when they seek that which is right and just from God, so that to each He says, "What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?" and then He does it. Yes, indeed, often He does more than we ask, or venture to ask of Him, as in the instance of Zacchæus,[3] of whom we shall treat presently. Therefore, you have it as a certainty, that whatsoever you faithfully and perseveringly ask of God you shall obtain. Neither ought you to be ashamed, for neither the blind man, nor the Canaanite, nor Zacchæus, were ashamed to ask favours of God; and they obtained them. So neither ought we to be ashamed of the service of God, and to lay aside our sin, and to seek from God necessary graces. For to have bashfulness and shame, appertains either to great virtue or to great vice. Of which S. Bernard says,[4] "There is a shame which bringeth sin, and there is a shame which bringeth glory. Good is the shame which hinders you from sinning, or which you feel on account of having sinned. And although no human judge be present, yet will you more

[1] S. Luke xviii. 1.
[2] S. Luke xi. 5.
[3] S. Luke xix. 2.
[4] In Lib. de Laude Nov. Mil.

chastely revere the Divine Presence when you consider how infinitely more pure God is than man, and that He is the more deeply offended by the sinner, because sin is something so alien to Himself. A shame of this kind does doubtless chase away reproach and bring glory; seeing that it will not admit sin on any terms, or, if it has been allowed, expels it by repenting of it and confessing it; for our glory is this, the testimony of our conscience. On the other hand, if any one is ashamed to confess his sins, and thus endures the burden of a guilty conscience, such a shame leads to sin, and robs the conscience of its glory; for the evil which is in the depth of the heart compunction tries to expel, but a foolish shame locks the lips and will not allow it egress." Again, "O shame, devoid of reason, enemy of salvation, stranger to honour and honesty." "Is it, then, a shame for a man to be overcome by God? is it counted a reproach to be humbled under the Mighty Hand of the Most High?" And again,[1] "The highest kind of victory is to yield to the Divine Majesty, and not to struggle against the authority of our Mother, the Church. O perversity, we are not ashamed to soil our feet, but we are ashamed to cleanse them! 'There is a shame,' according to the Wise Man, 'which bringeth glory,'[2] if we are ashamed to sin, or to have sinned; nor indeed will it lack glory, if shame restores what sin hath lost." "I know not anything in the human character more pleasing than bashfulness." And then he adds, "It is certainly the ornament of every age; but in those of tender years, this delicate grace of shamefacedness is especially manifest. What more attractive than youthful bashfulness? How bright and beautiful is this moral gem in the face and manners of youth! How true and sure an index of a good disposition, the presage of a hopeful future! The rod of discipline is exercised in ruling the

[1] Epist. 185, ad Eustach. [2] Ecclus. iv. 21.

affections, repressing youthful passions, restraining from the slightest evil whether of act or desire. What else puts to flight every improper word and utterance? Shame is the sister of chastity. It is the shining lamp of a pure mind; so that nothing low or vile enters into it or proceeds from it. It gives no quarter to evil, and is the protector of native purity, the special glory of the conscience, the guardian of a good name, the ornament of a life, the throne of virtue, the first of graces, the commendation of nature, the sign of all that is honourable. The blush upon the cheek which bashfulness may chance to bring, what grace and beauty does it not add to the countenance? Shame is so innate in the human mind, that those who are not ashamed to do evil are ashamed to be seen to do it." "Hiding works in darkness, and those which are worthy of being hidden." "What so grateful to a bashful disposition as retirement? If we pray, we are bidden to enter into our closet, that we may pray in secret. But this is ordered also as a precaution, lest, in the very act of praying, human praise should steal the fruit of the prayer, and mar our affection. But what so fitting for shame as the evidence of praise and boasting?" And, a little further on, "What so indecorous, especially in the young, as an ostentatious piety." "It is a good commendation of the prayer we are going to make, if it is preceded by shamefacedness." Thus far S. Bernard.

What comes under the consideration of this miracle may be applied to the case of two other blind men, to whom our Lord gave sight when He was going out of Jericho. But the blind man of whom we are speaking received sight as our Lord was entering the city. You can read about the others in S. Matthew and S. Mark,[1] where the name of one is given. For they cried to our Lord in the same way, and were heard by Him, and received their sight.

[1] S. Matt. xx. 30; Mark x. 46.

CHAPTER LXII.

How the Lord entered the House of Zacchæus.

When the Lord Jesus entered the city of Jericho, and was walking through it, Zacchæus, the chief among the publicans, having heard of this, was exceedingly desirous of seeing Him, but was unable to do so because of the crowd, and because he was little of stature. Therefore he climbed up into a sycamore tree, so that he might be able to see Him. But Jesus, knowing and accepting his faith and desire, said, "Zacchæus, make haste and come down; for to-day I must abide in thy house."[1] Then he came down, and received Him with great joy and reverence, and prepared a great feast for Him. You have seen the graciousness of the Lord Jesus. He grants Zacchæus more than he asks. He grants him Himself a favour he had never ventured to ask. Here, then, you have an instance of the virtue of prayer. For desire is a strong cry and a great prayer. Thus the Prophet says, "The Lord hath heard the desire of the poor. Thine ear hath heard the preparation of their heart."[2] And to Moses God said, "Wherefore criest thou to Me?"[3] when he had not opened his lips, but he had spoken with his heart.

Behold our Lord, then, sitting and eating with sinners. He seats Himself in the midst by the side of Zacchæus, and honours, it may be, some one by putting him at the head; then He converses familiarly and sociably with them, in order to draw them to Himself. See the disciples also,

[1] S. Luke xix. 5. [2] Ps. x. 17. [3] Exod. xiv. 15.

readily conversing with the same sinners, talking with them, and encouraging them to lead a better life. For they know that this is the will of their Master, and they too desired the salvation of these men.

CHAPTER LXIII.

Of the Healing of the Man who was Blind from his Birth.

When the Lord Jesus was going to Jerusalem, He saw a man who had been born blind, whose name tradition says was Cælidonius. The lowly Lord, stooping down, made clay with spittle, and anointed the eyes of the blind man, and sent him to wash in the pool of Siloam. He went, and washed, and came seeing. The miracle was seriously called in question by those malevolent men—much to their own confusion. See the history of this event in the Gospel, for it is sufficiently clear and beautiful. But in all this, fix your eyes on our Lord according to the directions we have before given; consider, too, how great was the gratitude of the blind man, who so manfully and persistently took the part of our Lord, before the very chiefs and elders of the Jews, and spared them in no word, though he had not yet seen Jesus. Very praiseworthy is the virtue of gratitude and acceptable to God, whilst the vice of ingratitude is detestable. Of this subject S. Bernard thus writes: "Learn to give thanks for every benefit individually. Diligently think on all you receive from Him, so that no gift may be deprived of its rightful acknowledgment, whether it be great, moderate, or small. Lastly, we are bidden to gather up the fragments, that nothing be lost; that is, that the least favour

may not be forgotten. For may not that be said to perish which is given to the ungrateful? Ingratitude is the enemy to the soul, the evacuation of merits, the dispersion of virtues, the destruction of all that is good. Ingratitude is a burning wind, drying up the springs of piety, the dew of pity, the streams of grace."[1] Thus S. Bernard.

CHAPTER LXIV.

How our Lord fled from the Temple, and hid Himself, when the Jews sought to stone Him.

Behold, now the mysteries of our Lord's Passion begin. Therefore, I shall from this time rarely quote any authorities, that I may the more readily give the history of the Passion and of all that led to it. When, then, on a certain occasion the Lord Jesus was preaching in the Temple, and said, among other things, "If any man keep My saying, he shall never taste of death,"[2] they replied, "Art Thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead?" And the Lord Jesus said, "Before Abraham was, I am." From which saying taking offence, as at something false or impossible, they took up stones to cast at Him. But He hid Himself, and went out of the Temple. For the hour of His Passion had not yet arrived. Regard our Lord, then, with deep compassion, how He, the Lord of all, was set at nought by these most wicked servants; and how, desirous of avoiding their fury, He hides Himself in some part of the Temple, behind some pillar, or amongst the people. Behold Him and His disciples, sorrowfully departing, with downcast look, as if feeble and defenceless.

[1] Serm. li. sup. Cant. [2] S. John viii. 51.

CHAPTER LXV.

How, at another Time, they wanted to stone Jesus.

When, on another occasion, the Lord Jesus, at the Feast of Dedication of the Temple, was in Solomon's porch, those ravenous wolves surrounded Him, with the greatest fury, gnashing with their teeth, and saying, "How long dost Thou make us to doubt? If Thou be the Christ, tell us plainly?"[1] But the most meek Lamb answered them humbly, saying, "I told you and ye believed not. The works which I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me." Contemplate Him at this moment, and all that happened, as before God. He Himself speaks to them in accents of humility; but they, with the fury of so many barking "dogs," roared at Him, and hemmed Him in on all sides; when they could no longer conceal the malice of their hearts. They, then, took up stones to cast at Him. But the Lord Jesus, nevertheless, most blandly addressed them, saying, "Many good works have I showed you; for which of those works do you stone Me?" They, amongst other things, replied, "Because that Thou, being a man, makest Thyself God." See their incredible madness! They wish Him to manifest Himself, and then because He does, both by word and deed, they seek to stone Him. Neither had they any excuse, for they could, and should, believe the Lord Jesus to be the Son of God. Because, however, His hour was not yet come, He escaped out of their hands, and retired beyond Jordan to a place where John baptized, which is distant from Jerusalem

[1] S. John x. 22.

about eighteen miles; and there He abode with His disciples. Behold Him, then, and His disciples as they sorrowfully depart, and compassionate them with all your power.

CHAPTER LXVI.

Concerning the Resurrection of Lazarus.

THE present miracle is a very celebrated one,[1] and affords much matter for serious thought; therefore give your whole attention to it, as if you were present and heard the words and saw the actions. Hold converse in spirit, not only with our Lord and His disciples, but with the members of that blessed family, so dear to the Lord and so devoted to Him; Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. Then Lazarus, being sick, the sisters, who were very intimate friends of our Lord, sent to Him to the place whither he had retired, namely, beyond Jordan, as we related in the previous chapter, saying, "Lazarus, our brother, whom Thou lovest, is sick." They said no more, either because this was enough to one Who loved, and Who understood all; or, because they feared to ask Him to come to them, knowing that the elders of the Jews were lying in wait for Him, and desirous to kill Him. But the Lord Jesus, having received the message, remained silent for two days; after that, He said to His disciples, among other things, "Lazarus is dead, and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there." See the wonderful goodness and kindness of our Lord, and His concern for His disciples. They were yet standing in need of greater

[1] S. John xi.

strength and virtue; wherefore He was ever seeking to act with a view to their advancement. Then they returned, and came to Bethany. Now, Martha, when she knew this, went forth to meet Him, and falling at His feet, said, "Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." But our Lord replied, that he should rise again; and then they conversed together on the resurrection. Then our Lord sent her for Mary, whom He loved with singular affection. And she, when she knew this, arose quickly, and came to Him, and fell down at His feet, saying like words to those which Martha had spoken. But the Lord Jesus, seeing His beloved friend in deep affliction, and in tears on account of the loss of her brother, was not able to restrain His own tears. Whereupon "Jesus wept." Contemplate Him, and the sisters, and the disciples. Do you not suppose that they wept also? After a few moments, all thus weeping, the Lord Jesus said, "Where have ye laid him?" He Himself knew this already, but He spoke as man. Then they said, "Lord, come and see." And they led Him to the grave. The Lord Jesus, we may imagine, then walks between the two sisters, comforting and strengthening them. And they were so consoled by His presence, that, as if unmindful of their sorrow and of all else, they fixed their attention solely on Him. While the three talked together by the way; Magdalen, we can picture, saying, "Lord, how hast Thou been since Thou hast left us? I had bitter sorrow at Thy departure, and now when I heard of Thy return, I had great joy, yet I feared, yea, I fear, greatly. For Thou knowest how our chiefs and elders are plotting against Thee, and therefore we did not venture to ask Thee to come. I rejoice that Thou hast come; but I pray you, before God, do not expose yourself to their snares." And the Lord, we can conceive, would answer, "Do not fear; My Father will provide for these

things." And thus conversing together, they reached the tomb. Then the Lord Jesus commanded the stone, which was placed upon it, to be taken off. But Martha demurred, saying, "Lord, he stinketh, for he hath been dead four days." O God, behold how wonderful is the love of these two sisters for the Lord Jesus. They would not that anything offensive should be endured by Him. However, none the less did the Lord insist on the stone being lifted up. Which being done, our Lord Jesus, with eyes raised towards heaven, said, "Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard Me. And I know that Thou hearest Me always; but because of these people which stand by, I said it, that they may believe that Thou hast sent Me."[1] Behold our Lord thus praying, and consider his zeal for the salvation of souls. Then He cried with a loud voice, saying, "Lazarus, come forth." And he immediately came back to life and stood forth, though as yet bound hand and foot. The disciples then, at the command of Christ, loose him. When loosed his sisters fall on their knees and give thanks to our Lord, Jesus for His so great benefit, and then they take him home. Those who were there and witnessed these things, wondered; and the miracle was blazed abroad, so that a great concourse of people from Jerusalem and other parts came to see Lazarus. But the rulers of the Jews, considering themselves baffled, began to plan Christ's death.

[1] S. John xi. 42.

CHAPTER LXVII.

Of the Cursing of the Fig Tree.

ALTHOUGH, according to the letter of history, the cursing of the fig tree, and the presentation of the woman taken in adultery, are believed to have taken place after the entry of our Lord into Jerusalem, when He rode upon an ass; yet it seems more fitting that we should meditate upon nothing after that event, but His Supper and Passion, and the circumstances of those mysteries, and therefore I have thought it well to deal with the two former subjects in this place.

When, then, our Lord Jesus went towards Jerusalem, and was suffering from hunger, he saw a fig tree,[1] beautiful and leafy, in the way. But coming to it, and finding no figs upon it, He cursed it. And immediately it withered away, so that the disciples marvelled. Behold our Lord, then, and His disciples, according to the suggestions which I have before made. Consider, also, that this was a mystical act on the part of our Lord, for He knew that the time of figs was not yet. By this tree, full of leaves, we may understand men who have plenty of words but no deeds; also hypocrites and dissemblers, who, having a fair outside, are inwardly empty and fruitless.

[1] S. Matt. xxi. 18; S. Mark xi. 20.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

Of the Woman taken in Adultery.

Those vile rulers and Pharisees were ever, in their malice, on the watch against the Lord Jesus, and anxiously took counsel together how they might overcome Him by stratagem and conceit, and render Him odious to the people. But their arrows were hurled back upon themselves. When, then, a certain woman was taken in adultery, and ought, according to the law, to be stoned, they brought her to Him in the Temple, and asked Him what should be done with her, desirous of placing Him in a difficulty. For had He decided that the law should be observed, they would have charged Him with cruelty and mercilessness; and if, on the other hand, he had decided that the law should not be observed, they would have charged Him with lawlessness. But the wise Lord saw their snares, and knew how to avoid them; and thus He humbly stooped down, and wrote with His finger on the ground. The old commentary says, He wrote down their sins. That writing was of such power that each of them recognized their sins thereby. Then our Lord, raising Himself up, said, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her."[1] And again He stooped down—this gracious Lord, considerate even towards those who envied and hated Him, lest they should be too much abashed. But they went out from His presence, and so their deceitfulness was frustrated. The Lord Jesus then warned the woman not to sin any more, and let her go. Behold Him, then, attentively in all these deeds and words.

[1] S. John viii. 7.

CHAPTER LXIX.

Of the Conspiracy of the Jews against Jesus, and of His Flight into the City of Ephraim.

THE time approaching in which the Lord Jesus determined to effect our Redemption by the shedding of His Blood, the Devil armed his ministers and sharpened their malice against our Lord, even to make them thirst for His death. The good works of our Lord, and especially the raising of Lazarus, more and more inflamed them against Him, until they were consumed with envy. Not being able to put off their revenge, the chief priests and Pharisees at once held a council, in which, at the prophecy of Caiaphas, they deliberated upon the death of the most innocent Lamb. O wicked council! O most infamous leaders of the people, most wretched counsellors! What are you doing, miserable men? What so great fury drives you on? What determination is this you arrive at? What reason is there for the death of our Lord God? Is He not in the midst of you, Whom you knew not, knowing all your words, searching your reins and hearts? But thus it must be as you desire; the Father hath delivered Him into your hands; by you He shall be slain, but you shall not profit thereby; He indeed shall die and rise again, that He may save His people from their sins, and you will perish.

The decision of the council was noised abroad, but the prudent Lord willed to give place to anger, and because all things were not yet done, He departed into the region near the desert, to the city of Ephraim; and thus the humble Lord flies before the face of His most wicked servants.

Contemplate those wicked men, raging against Him in their abominable council. Behold, also, the Lord Jesus retiring with His disciples, like poor and helpless men. What, think you, said the Magdalen at this? And what were the feelings of our Lord's mother, who might have seen Him thus depart, and have known the cause, that they wanted to kill Him? You can imagine her and the holy women remaining with Magdalen, and our Lord, before His departure, consoling them by the promise of His quick return.

CHAPTER LXX.

How the Lord Jesus returned to Bethany, where Mary Magdalen anointed His Feet.

As, at a former time, the Lord Jesus, for our instruction, used *prudence*, in fleeing, showing how there are places and occasions, when we ought warily to avoid the fury of our persecutors; so now He uses *fortitude*, because His time had come. Thus He returns of His own accord, to offer Himself for His Passion, and that He might deliver Himself up into the hands of His enemies. Thus on another occasion He employed *temperance*, when He avoided the honour which the crowds wanted to thrust upon Him, in making Him a king. On the other hand, He displayed *justice*, when He received the honour which was due to Him as a king, as the people went forth to meet Him with branches cut down from the trees, and He willed to allow this simple triumph, and therefore He rode upon an ass, as S. Bernard says.[1] These four virtues, prudence, fortitude,

[1] Serm. 2, in Ramis.

temperance, and justice, the Lord of Virtues for our sakes made use of. They are called cardinal, or chief, because from them all other moral virtues flow. By no means, therefore, is our Lord to be considered variable, as no one of us would be, if on different occasions we exercised different virtues.

The Lord Jesus, then, on the Sabbath day before Palm Sunday, returns to Bethany, which is not far from Jerusalem, that is about two miles; and there they made Him a supper, in the house of Simon the leper; but Lazarus, Martha, and Mary were also there, who were, perhaps, relations, or at least on intimate terms with Simon. Then Mary poured upon His Head a pound of precious ointment, and with it anointed His Head and His Feet. This deed, which she had once done in the same house out of contrition, she did now from the motive of devotion. For she loved Him above all things, and could never do enough to serve Him. But Judas, the traitor, murmured at this. Whereupon the Lord replied to him, and defended her, as was right. Nevertheless the traitor remained indignant, and from thence took occasion to betray Him; and on the Wednesday following, he sold the Lord Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. See, then, our Lord, sitting at supper with His friends, and conversing with them during the short time which elapsed before His Passion. But further, see Him in the house of Lazarus, in that house of him and of his sister, which was His ordinary shelter. There He eat by day, and slept at night with His disciples. There, haply, His Blessed Mother also rested with the sisters, for she was greatly honoured by all, and Magdalen, we may imagine, clung to her, and could by no means be torn from her. Behold the Virgin Mother, filled with fear for her most beloved Son, from that time never voluntarily perhaps quitting His Presence. And when the Lord, defending Magdalen from

the murmuring of the betrayer, said, "In that she hath poured this ointment on My Body, she did it for My burial,"[1] do you not suppose that the sword of this word pierced through His mother's heart? For how could He more expressly speak of His Death? Likewise, all the rest were terrified with fear, and full of anxious surmisings, speaking one with another, now here, now there, as people speak who have some terrible communication to make. But their fear reached its height when He went into Jerusalem, which He did daily. For from that Sabbath to the Supper, He spake much to the Jews, and did many works openly in Jerusalem, to which I intend to make no reference, save to His Entry when riding on an ass; lest our meditations concerning Himself be interrupted, for we are on the very threshold of the Passion. Take heed, then, and gather up all your powers, so as to avoid all distraction, that you may thus be enabled to meditate well on the mysteries which precede the Passion, as well as on the Passion itself, with a mind free from cares, and very attentive; in the meanwhile, converse freely at Bethany with those who are assembled there.

CHAPTER LXXI.

Of our Lord's Entry into Jerusalem upon an Ass; and how on some occasions Jesus is said to have wept.

This time is rich in mysteries; the Scriptures are now to be fulfilled by the Lord Jesus; the time is at hand, and He burns to bring a remedy to this sinful world through the

[1] S. Matt. xxvi. 12.

suffering of His own Body. Therefore the day following, very early in the morning, which was the Lord's day, He prepared Himself in a new and unusual manner to enter Jerusalem, but as it had been prophesied of Him. When He was about to start, we can imagine His mother with pious tenderness wanting to retain Him. "My Son, wilt Thou go! You know how they will conspire against Thee, when you are among them. I pray that You may not go." Likewise to His disciples, it seemed intolerable that He should go, and they, too, would do anything to deter Him. We can imagine, too, Magdalen saying, "Lord, do not go; they seek to kill Thee. If You get into their hands, to-day they will take Thee, and be able to carry out their designs." O God! how they loved Him, and how bitter to them was everything that would hurt Him. But He had disposed it otherwise, and was athirst for the salvation of the world, and answered them, "It is the will of My Father that I should go. Come, fear not, for He is our defence, and in the evening we shall return safe and sound." Then the Lord began to go, and His few and faithful friends accompanied Him.

But when He had arrived at Bethphage, a small village on the way, He sent two of His disciples to Jerusalem, to bring to Him an ass and her foal, which were bound in a certain place, set apart for the use of the poor. Which having been done, the Lord Jesus mounted, first upon the ass, and then upon the colt, humbly, and the disciples placed their garments upon them. And thus rode the Lord of the world. And though most just was it that He should be honoured, yet at the time of honour, such were His attendants, such His adornments. Behold him, then, attentively, and see how, in the midst of receiving honour, He reproved the vain pomp of the world. The animals were adorned with no bridles of gold, no ornamented harness with trappings

of silk, after the manner of the folly of the world, but with poor clothes, and with two small cords; though He was the King of kings and Lord of lords. Yet the crowds, when they knew that He was approaching, went out to meet Him, and received Him as a king with acclamations and songs of joy, with the strewing of garments and of branches from the trees, and with great gladness. But with their joy He mingled weeping. For when He beheld Jerusalem, He wept over it, saying, "If thou hadst known," etc., thou, also, wouldst weep.

You must know that we read that the Lord Jesus wept three times. Once at the death of Lazarus, in witnessing human misery; once on this occasion, at human blindness and ignorance. For here He wept, "because they knew not the time of their visitation." On a third time He wept, at human sin and malice, because He foresaw, that though His Passion sufficed for all, yet all would not profit from it, for some would be reprobate, hard-hearted, and impenitent. Of this weeping the Apostle speaks, when writing to the Hebrews. He says, "Who, with strong crying and tears, was heard in that He feared;"[1] for the text includes these three occasions. But the Church holds that He wept at another time, namely, as an Infant, and therefore she sings, "The Infant weeps," etc. And this might have taken place, to hide from the devil the mystery of the Incarnation. Contemplate Him, then, now weeping, and you ought, indeed, to weep with Him; for He weeps abundantly and strongly, for it was no feigned sorrow, but a true grief with Him. Wherefore with bitter heart He wept over their eternal loss. He predicted also their temporal ruin.

Behold, then, His disciples, who faithfully kept near Him, with fear and reverence; these are His barons and counts, His attendants and guards. Think, also, of His mother,

[1] Heb. v. 7.

with Magdalen and the other women, as following after Him. And suppose not, that when He wept, His mother and His disciples refrained from tears.

The Lord Jesus, then, entered into the city, with such triumph, and amid such honour from the crowds, that the whole city was moved. Whereupon He went into the Temple, and cast out the buyers and sellers. This was the second time He did this. After that, the Lord Jesus stood and publicly taught the people in the Temple, and answered the chief priests and Pharisees even till evening. And though He had received such honours, there was no one found to offer Him hospitality. The whole day, then, He and His disciples remained fasting, and then late in the evening returned to Bethany. Behold Him, as now He leaves the city in a very humble condition; but few went forth with Him, Who was in the morning conducted into the city attended with such honours. From which occurrence you may gather the lesson, how little should we care for the honours of the world, which are so short-lived. You may imagine how Magdalen rejoiced, and the others, when they saw their Lord honoured by the crowds, and how much more, when He and His disciples returned safe and sound to Bethany.

CHAPTER LXXII.

How we may depict the Lord Jesus, revealing to His Mother His approaching Death.

This is a beautiful subject for meditation, though we have no record of it in Holy Scripture. We can imagine our Lord, as on the Wednesday He took supper with His

disciples, in the house of Mary and Martha; His mother and the holy women being in another part of the house, and Magdalen, who served, asking Him, saying, "Master, let us know that You will keep the Passover with us; I pray Thee, do not refuse us." To which our Lord could by no means assent, as He was about to keep the Passover at Jerusalem. Then Magdalen, retiring in tears, might be depicted as going to Christ's mother, and laying before her the desire which she had revealed to our Lord, that she might ask Him.

Then, supper being ended, imagine the Lord Jesus returning to His mother, and conversing with her at her side, affording her the delight of His presence, which was so soon to be withdrawn. Behold them, in spirit, conversing together, our Lord and His mother; see her reverence and affection for Him. Then Magdalen goes to them, and throws herself at His feet, and repeats her request, saying, that our Lord will fall into the hands of His enemies, if He goes to Jerusalem for the Passover. Whereupon His mother, with a mother's tenderness, beseeches Him, if it may be, that He should not go, because of the snares which were laid to take Him at Jerusalem. And the Lord, we can conceive, replying, "Mother, most beloved, it is the will of My Father that I should keep the Passover there, because the time of Redemption has come, and now all things must be fulfilled which are written of Me, and they shall do to Me what they will." But the holy women heard these things with an intensity of sorrow, for they well understood that He spake of His death. At this, we can imagine that Christ's mother was deeply moved. "My Son," we can hear her say, in broken utterances, "I am overwhelmed with grief and my heart has failed me;" yet was she content to leave all in the Father's hands, only desirous, naturally, for a little delay, that they might keep the Passover with their friends. But the thought would come,—"Had it been otherwise

ordered, Redemption might have been wrought, without Thy death, for all things are possible with God."

O what a scene of sorrow is here! Look at our Lord, with love grieving for His mother; Magdalen simply prostrated with the tidings of His approaching Death. All is sighs and tears. Can you restrain weeping as you contemplate their grief?

Consider them, then, in this state; and then our Lord graciously comforting them. "Weep not," says He. "Know you not that I must accomplish the will of My Father obediently? But have no doubts, for quickly I shall return to you, and on the third day I shall rise again in safety. It is My Father's will that I should keep the Passover on Mount Zion." And Magdalen said, "As we cannot detain Thee here, we will go to Jerusalem also; but, I believe, never will be seen so bitter a Passover." The Lord, it may be, consented that they also should keep the Passover in the house at Jerusalem.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

On the Lord's Supper. Of the Table and the Way of sitting at Meat. The Example of Five Virtues of Christ in the Supper. Also Five Points of our Lord's Discourse.

THE time being close at hand, of the infinite mercies of our Lord Jesus, in which He had disposed to save His people, and to redeem them, not with corruptible things as silver and gold, but with His own most precious blood; He wills to celebrate a wonderful Supper with His disciples, before He by death should leave them, for a memorial in token of

remembrance, and also that He might fulfil the mysteries which remained to be accomplished. This was a very magnificent Supper, and the things which our Lord Jesus did at it, were illustrious also. To meditate aright on these, strive with all your powers to be in spirit present at the scene: for if you make this meditation worthily and with care, the gracious Lord will not suffer you to go empty away. There are four principal points for meditation, taking the events in order. First, the actual repast; secondly, the washing of the disciples' feet; thirdly, the institution of the most holy Sacrament; and fourthly, the substance of our Lord's most beautiful discourse.

And first of the Supper itself, as a bodily repast. Consider how Peter and John were sent by the order of the Lord Jesus to a certain friend in Mount Zion, where there was a large upper room furnished and made ready for the Passover. And our Lord with His disciples on Thursday, at noontide, entered the city, and went to this place. Picture Him standing in some part of the house, and edifying His disciples by His words; and in the meanwhile, some of the seventy prepared the Passover in the upper room. In the legend of S. Martial, some of the seventy, it is said, were present, late in the evening, ministering to the Lord Jesus. But when all were now ready in the room, the most beloved John, who was busily going in and out, making preparations and lending his help, came to the Lord Jesus: "Lord, when Thou pleasest, Thou mayest sup, for all things are ready." Look now attentively at, and linger upon all the things which are said and done; for they are most affecting, and are not to be curiously passed over, but, like the other actions of our Lord's Life, to be well pondered. For in this lies the great force of meditation, especially when the infinite love of Christ is the theme, as in the surpassing wonders which took place at this Supper.

Then the Lord Jesus arose, and His disciples with Him. And John, taking up his position at His side, could by no means henceforth be separated from Him, for no one clung to our Lord so faithfully and familiarly as John. He it was, who, when our Lord was taken, entered with Him into the hall of the high priest; nor in His Crucifixion, nor at His Death, nor after His Death, did he leave Him, until He was laid in the tomb. And in this Supper John was next to Jesus, though younger than the rest. All, then, enter the supper-room, and having washed their hands, and standing round the table, most devoutly give thanks. Look minutely at them. You must know that the table was close to the ground, and they sat on the ground, according to the ancient custom. There are traditions about this table which we need not here reproduce. All eat from one dish, as we learn from those words, "He that dippeth his hand with Me in the dish, the same shall betray me."[1] A blessing being given by the Right Hand of our Lord, they sit or recline round the table, John sitting next the Lord Jesus Christ, and now the Paschal lamb is brought in.

But observe that you may depict this scene in two ways. In one way you may represent the disciples as sitting, as I have already said; in another, as standing with staves in their hands, eating the lamb with bitter herbs, and thus obeying the letter of the old law. Yet you must imagine them, at any rate, as sitting afterwards to eat, as may be inferred from many places in Scripture; for how else could John have leaned on the Lord's breast, unless they were sitting? The Paschal lamb was brought in roasted, and the true and spotless Lamb took it, the Lord Jesus, who was among them as one that serveth, and who cut it into portions, and gave it joyfully to His disciples, exhorting them to eat. And they eat, but not with cheerfulness, for

[1] S. Matt. xxvi. 23.

they knew not what new thing might happen to their Master. And whilst they were at supper, He revealed more clearly what was to follow, and said, amongst other things, "With desire have I desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer,[1] but one of you shall betray Me." His saying pierced them to the very heart, like a sharp sword, and made them cease eating; and, looking at each other, they exclaimed, "Lord, is it I?" Regard them attentively, and compassionate both our Lord and them, for they are in a most sorrowful position. But the traitor, lest these words should seem to apply to him, perhaps, does not cease eating. John then, at the entreaty of S. Peter, asked and said, "Lord, who is it that shall betray Thee?"[2] And the Lord Jesus, with singular love, opened to him the secret, but John was struck dumb and wounded to the very heart, and turned himself towards our Lord, and leaned on His breast. But our Lord did not tell S. Peter, for S. Augustine says he would, had he known it, have torn the traitor to pieces. But Peter represents the Active Life, John the Contemplative, as S. Augustine says in the same Homily on the Gospel, which was read on the Festival of S. John. You may infer from this that the contemplative man does not interrupt the actions of the inner life, and even concerning offences, does not call down Divine vengeance, but groans inwardly, and turns himself in prayer to God, and draws more closely to Him in contemplation, committing everything to His disposal. Thus, if S. John did not tell S. Peter, though it was at the instance of the latter the question was asked, you may gather that the contemplative man should not always make known the secrets of the Lord, though the contemplative may go forth, from zeal for souls and for God, into the ministries of the Active Life. Thus it is reported of S. Francis, that he did not reveal to others his secret revela-

[1] S. Luke xx. 15. [2] S. John xiii. 25.

tions, unless zeal for his brother's salvation urged it, or a spiritual instinct given with the revelation itself dictated it.

Now, then, behold the lovingkindness of the Lord, how graciously He allows the beloved disciple to lean on His breast. O how tenderly do they love each other! Observe also the other disciples, much distressed at this saying of our Lord; not eating, but gazing at each other, not knowing what course to take. This suffices for the first point.

To the second, give diligent attention. For whilst they were in this state, the Lord Jesus rises from supper, and immediately the disciples also rise, not knowing what he was going to do. Then we may depict Him going down into a lower room in the same house, as tradition relates; and He made them all sit down, and ordered water to be brought to Him. Then He lays aside His garments, girds Himself with a towel,[1] and pours water into a stone basin, that He might wash their feet. Peter refuses, and, full of amazement, declines an action in his judgment so unfitting. But upon hearing the warning of Christ, he wisely changed his opinion for the better. Consider, then, well each action, and contemplate all with wonder. Highest Majesty bows Himself down, and the Master of humility stands bending down to the feet of a fisherman, and with bent knees, while they were sitting, washes with His own hands their feet, dries, and, it may be, kisses them. But that which magnifies His humility above all the rest, is, that He performed the same service for the traitor himself. But O, wicked heart, and harder than all hardness; if thou art not softened at the sight of such humility; if thou dost not reverence the Lord of Majesty; if even still thou thirstest for the death of One Who has ever shown thee kindness, ever been free from doing any harm! Woe to thee, wretched man! What thy hardened heart hath conceived, thou shalt bring forth; not, however, He, but thou shalt really perish.

[1] S. John xiii. 4.

Here, then, we should marvel at so great a depth of humility and kindness, etc.

Having, then, completed this service, He returned to the upper room, and reclining again, He exhorted His disciples to imitate His example. You can then, in this place, meditate how the Lord Jesus, on that evening, gave us an example of five great virtues: namely, of humility, in washing their feet; of charity, in the Sacrament of His Body and Blood, and in His discourse, which is full of precepts of love; of patience, in bearing with the traitor, and the many insults He endured when captured and led away as a robber; of obedience, in undergoing His Passion and Death in submission to His Father; of prayer, by praying thrice in the Garden. Let us, then, endeavour to imitate these virtues of our Blessed Lord. We add no more on this.

But in meditating on the third point, wonder at Christ's amazing and loving condescension, and unspeakable charity, whereby He gave Himself for us, and left Himself for our spiritual nourishment. When He had washed the disciples' feet, He sat down again, willing to put an end to the institutions and sacrifices of the old law; and to ordain a New Covenant, making Himself the New Sacrifice, He took bread, and raised His eyes to His Father, and consecrating the most Holy Sacrament of His Body and Blood, gave it to His disciples, saying, THIS IS MY BODY, which is given for you. And likewise, taking the cup, He said, THIS IS MY BLOOD, which is shed for you.

Behold this mystery, then, thoughtfully before God, and see how carefully, faithfully, and devoutly our Lord does every action, and how, with His own Hands, He communicated that His beloved and blessed family. And then, as a memorial of His love, He adds, "Do this in remembrance of Me." This is that Memorial which, when the grateful

soul receives, whether by eating or by spiritual meditation, it ought to be inflamed and inebriated with love, and through the intensity of devotion and affection transformed into the Lord Himself. For nothing could He leave for us dearer, sweeter, and more profitable than Himself. For He Who comes to us in the Sacrament, is the same Who was wonderfully conceived and born of the Virgin, Who endured death for you, and Who rose again, and ascended gloriously, and sits at the Right Hand of the Father. He it is Who created heaven, and earth, and all things, and Who rules and guides them. He it is on whom your salvation depends, in whose power and will, it is to give, or not to give, the glory of Paradise. He it is Who is offered for you and is given to you. He is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God. This on our third point.

But concerning the fourth head, which is something supperadded to the rest, attend to the other marks of Christ's love. For He makes a most beautiful discourse, full of sweetness, and glowing with the fire of love. Having communicated His disciples, and that most vile Judas (according to S. Augustine, though others think he did not communicate), the Lord Jesus says to Judas, "That thou doest, do quickly."[1] But he, wretched man, went out, and went to the chief priests, to whom on the Wednesday before he had sold Him, for thirty pieces of silver, and sought from them a band of soldiers to take Him. But in the interim the Lord Jesus delivered to His disciples this discourse, from which, in its whole extent, admirable, useful, and venerable, I take five principal points for meditation. First, how, foretelling His departure, our Lord comforted them. For He said, "Yet a little while I am with you," but "I will not leave you comfortless; I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice." These things, and the like, which I

[1] S. John xiii. 27.

briefly run through, He said to them, which went through and pierced them to their very hearts. For they were not able to bear the thought of His departure. Secondly, meditate about this discourse, how cordially and earnestly He instructs them upon charity, saying in many places, "These things I command you, that ye love one another; by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another," and similar teaching which you can find in abundance in the sacred text. Thirdly, meditate in this discourse upon the way in which our Lord carefully exhorted them to the observance of His commandments, saying, "If ye love Me, keep My commandments,"[1] and, "If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love,"[2] and similar things. Fourthly, take for your meditation the way He encourages His disciples against tribulation, which He foretold would come upon them, in this manner: "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."[3] And again, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you."[4] "The world shall rejoice," but "ye shall be sorrowful; but your sorrow shall be turned into joy."[5] Fifthly, contemplate the Lord Jesus lifting up His eyes unto Heaven, turning to His Father and saying, "Father, keep those whom Thou hast given Me; while I was with them in the world, I kept them, but now I come unto Thee; Holy Father, I pray for them; I pray not for the world; neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word. Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory;"[6] and other similar utterances, which were truly heart-rending. It is wonderful, indeed, how the disciples, who so intensely loved their Lord, could bear these words.

[1] S. John xiv. 15. [2] S. John xv. 10. [3] S. John xvi. 33.
[4] S. John xv. 18. [5] S. John xvi. 20. [6] S. John xvii.

If, then, you meditate with attention on the sayings which are to be found in this discourse, and lay them to heart, you will rest in a sense of their sweetness, and you will burn within at so great condescension, kindness, consideration, indulgence, and love, as well as at the other actions of our Lord which were done that evening.

Behold Him, then, as He speaks, how efficaciously, how earnestly, how sweetly, He addresses them, impressing on the minds of His disciples what he says, and regaling them with the tenderness of His looks and words. Behold, too, the disciples, how mournfully they droop their heads, and weep and draw long sighs, filled to the full with sadness, as the Truth itself bears witness: "Because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart."[1] But, amongst the rest, observe John, in close communion with Jesus; with what attention and eagerness He regards His Beloved, and with tender anxiety gathers up His every word. For S. John alone has handed down to us a record of these things. Amongst other things, the Lord Jesus said to them, "Arise, let us go hence." O, what fear took possession of them, not knowing whither they went, or how they were to go, and fearing above all else that they would be separated from Him; nevertheless, He did not at that moment conclude, but continued His discourse, and then went on with it along the way. See, then, the disciples going after Him and with Him, each one drawing as close to Him as he could, gathering together like a flock, even as chickens round the hen; first one, and then the other pressing forward with the desire of touching Him and hearing His words, while He willingly suffered this from them.

At last, all these mysteries having been finished, He went into the Garden, across the brook Cedron, and there He awaited the arrival of the traitor, and his armed band.

[1] S. John xvi. 6.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

Meditation on the Passion of our Lord in General.

It is now time for us to treat of the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who would glory in the Passion and Cross of our Lord, ought to apply himself devoutly and tenderly to these mysteries, and their attendant circumstances; for if they are regarded with intentness of mind, they would, I think, have a transforming effect upon those who meditate upon them. For to him who searches into these mysteries with earnestness and with the whole energy of his inmost being, many unexpected lights will be vouchsafed, from which will spring up new sympathy, new love, new consolation, and consequently a new state of grace, which would seem to him a foretaste of, and partaking of glory. But to attain to this state, approach the meditation in the spirit of a child and unlettered person, so that you may make every effort to attend, keeping the eyes of your heart with watchfulness lest you wander from the subject, and banishing all other thoughts. You must direct your attention to these scenes of the Passion, as if you were actually present at the Cross; and watch the Crucifixion of our Lord with affection, diligence, love, and perseverance. I exhort you, that if you have carefully considered all that has been said concerning His life hitherto, that you redouble your attention now, and give your undivided energy to all that is to follow, for in this His love is most manifest, which ought to kindle our whole hearts. But receive all that I shall relate, with the same modification as before,—

namely, that the things *may* have happened as I describe them. For I would not affirm anything in this little Work, which was not affirmed in or corroborated by the Holy Scriptures, or the sayings of the Saints, or received opinions.

But it seems to me quite reasonable, that not only the crucifixion of our Lord, the penalty of our sins, which caused His Death, but also all the preceding and attendant circumstances of that event, are worthy of the most intense compassion, grief, and amazement. What is it, indeed, but this, that our Lord Himself, God blessed above all things, from the hour of the night when He was taken, up to the hour of His crucifixion, the sixth hour, was in a continual conflict, great suffering, reproaches, mockings, and tortures! No intermission was granted Him. But in what a struggle and conflict He was engaged, hear and see. Contemplate the sweet, meek, and gracious Jesus. One seizes Him, another binds Him, another assaults Him, and another cries out at Him, another pushes Him, another blasphemes, another spits on Him, and another jolts Him, another grasps Him, another questions Him, some seek false witness against Him, another puts himself in collusion with them; one bears witness falsely against Him, another accuses Him, another derides Him, another blindfolds Him, another strikes His blessed face, another buffets Him, another leads Him to the pillar, another strips Him, another, while He is led, gives Him a blow, another shouts at Him, another lays hold of Him to insult Him, another binds Him to the pillar, another rushes at Him, and another lashes Him; one clothes Him with purple in mockery, and another crowns Him with thorns; one places a reed in His hand, another madly snatches it to smite with it His thorn crowned head; another denyingly bows the knee, another derides him who does so; and many heaped reproaches on Him. He is

led forward and back, is spit upon, despised, hurried about as if a fool or some most mad person, even as if a robber and wicked malefactor. Now He is taken to Annas, then to Caiaphas, then to Pilate, then to Herod, and back again to Pilate, and then He is dragged in, and then out, and then along. My God, what is this? Does it not seem to you most hard, most bitter, a continuous and violent conflict? But wait a little, and you shall see worse treatment. The rulers, the Pharisees, the elders, and thousands of people stand against Him persistently. They all shout with one accord, "Let Him be crucified." On His bruised and already wounded shoulders the cross is laid, on which He is to be crucified; on all sides citizens and strangers, not only sober and elderly, but also profane and drunken men, flock together, not to compassionate, but most shamefully to deride Him. No one recognizes Him, but all are eager to cover Him with mud and filth, and to ill-use Him; and He endures all this, He becomes their byword. "They that sit in the gate speak against 'Him,' and the drunkards make songs upon 'Him.'"[1] He is driven forward, and pressed; He is dragged, and hurried along; and thus scourged, wearied, covered with wounds, and overwhelmed with reproaches, He is not allowed a moment's rest; and scarcely can He keep His life in Him, until He reaches the place of Calvary—most unclean and loathsome spot! All is done with force and fury. But in this place, an end and rest is to be given to the struggle of which we treat; but that rest is but the beginning of a sharper struggle, namely, crucifixion and the bed of pain. Behold what a rest is this! You see how, even to the sixth hour, our Lord suffered this long and hard conflict. Indeed, "the waters came in even to His soul," truly "many dogs came about Him"[2]—many, terrible, strong, ferocious—and the council of the wicked

[1] Ps. lxix. 12. [2] Ps. xxii. 16.

laid siege against Him, "who whet their tongue like a sword and shot out their arrows, even bitter words."[1] We have thus summarized what may be said of our Lord's Passion during the three first hours, even to twelve o'clock. But not indeed in this brief way must we dismiss so great bitterness and punishment for our sins which our Lord Jesus endured; reflect upon these, and re-consider all. Great, indeed, and manifold is the matter here for holy meditation, penetrating to the inmost heart and affections; be present, then, in spirit. We have as yet spoken of these sufferings only in general terms. Now we will dwell upon the separate details, for we ought not to grow weary of meditating upon these pains, which our Lord wearied not in enduring.

CHAPTER LXXV.

Meditation on our Lord's Passion before Matins.

Resume, then, the meditations from the commencement of the Passion, and follow the order even to the end. I shall content myself with a brief history, leaving each one to enlarge upon and draw out the points of meditation, as the Lord grants him the grace to do so.

Attend then, to every particular, as if actually present; see Him, our Dear Lord, as He goes forth from the Supper, and how, having finished His discourse, He enters the Garden with His disciples. At length, enter with Him, and ponder how affectionately, kindly, and confidingly He talks with them, and exhorts them to prayer; how also He withdraws from them a little, that is, about a stone's cast, and falling down humbly and reverently upon His knees He

[1] Ps. lxiv. 3.

prays to His Father. Pause here a little while, and revolve in your mind devoutly the marvels of the Lord God.

Now the Lord Jesus prays; often before this we read that He prayed; but on those occasions He prayed as an advocate, now He prays for Himself. Pity Him, and admire His most profound lowliness. For although, as God, He is co-eternal and co-equal with the Father, He seems as it were to forget that He is God, and prays as man, and takes up the posture of one of the weakest creatures, praying to the Lord. Consider, too, His most perfect obedience; for what does He pray for? Certainly, He prays to the Father, that the hour of death may pass from Him; that is, if it be the Father's will that He might not die; and this prayer is not heard, that is according to a sort of will which was in Him. For, so to speak, there was a manifold will in Him. Here, then, exercise pity upon Him, in that the Father wills that He should die, and thus, through His True and Only Son, He spared Him not, but in this way delivered Him up for us all. For "so God loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son." And the Lord Jesus fulfils this command, and reverentially accomplishes it See, in the third place, the unspeakable love for us, both of the Father and of the Son, most worthy of compassion, wonder, and veneration; for us this Death is appointed; for us it is endured, through Their exceeding love. The Lord Jesus, then, prays to the Father for a long time, saying, "O My most merciful Father, I beseech Thee, hear My prayer, and hide not Thyself from My petition. Consider and hear Me, how I mourn in My prayer, and My Heart is disquieted within Me.[1] Incline Thine ear to Me, and hearken to the voice of My prayer. It pleased Thee, O Father, to send Me into the world, that I might make satisfaction for the injury done to Thee by man; and imme-

[1] Ps. lv. 1, 2, 4.

diately when Thou didst will, I said, Lo, I come; in the volume of the book it is written of Me, that I should fulfil Thy Will, O My God; I am content to do it; My talk hath been of Thy Truth and of Thy Salvation.[1] I have been in poverty and much labour from My youth up, doing Thy will, and all that Thou hast commanded; and I am prepared to fulfil whatever remains. Yet, if it be, O My Father, take from Me this so great bitterness as is prepared for Me by My enemies; for see, O Father, the enmity of the multitude, how many they are, and how they conspire against Me, and take their counsel to take away My life.[2] But, Holy Father, if I have done any such thing, or if there be any iniquity in My hands, if I have rewarded evil to him who dealt friendly with Me, then let Mine enemy take Me. I have always done those things which are pleasing in Thy sight; but they have rewarded Me evil for good, and hatred for My good-will. They have corrupted My disciple, and made him their guide, that they might kill Me; they have valued Me at thirty pieces of silver, at which I was prized by them. I pray Thee, O My Father, that this cup may pass from Me; but if it seem otherwise to Thee, not My will, but Thine be done. But, O Father, stand up to help Me; make speed to save Me: for granted that they knew Me not, O most Beloved Father, to be Thy Son, yet because I led among them a blameless life, and conferred upon them many benefits, they ought not to be so cruel against Me. For remember that I stood before Thee, that I might speak in their behalf, and turn away Thine indignation from them. But alas! shall evil be recompensed for good? But they have digged a pit for My soul,[3] and prepared a most shameful death for Me. Thou seest, O Lord; be not silent; go not far from Me, for trouble is hard at

[1] Ps. xl. 9, 10, 12. [2] Ps. xxxi. 15. [3] Jer. xviii. 20.

hand, and there is none to help Me.[1] Thou hast known My reproof, My shame, and My dishonour; My adversaries are all in Thy sight; Thy rebuke hath broken My heart; I am full of heaviness."[2]

And the Lord Jesus returned to His disciples, awoke them, and exhorted them to pray. And again a second and third time He returned to prayer; for He prayed in three different spots, which were about a stone's cast apart; not indeed as far as a stone may be thrown with a violent effort, but a short distance, perhaps about the length of an ordinary house, as tradition relates; and still upon those spots are said to be marks of the remains of Churches. He returned, then, to prayer, as I have said, a second, and a third time, and prayed the same words, and may have added, "Father, if it be decreed that I should undergo the suffering of the Cross, Thy Will be done. I commend to Thee My mother and My disciples; I have protected them hitherto; My Father, defend them now." And in the meanwhile, the most sacred Blood flowed from His Body, breaking forth as sweat, in this conflict or agony, whilst He prayed more earnestly, and the drops fell copiously to the ground.

Consider Him, now, at this time, how great is the anguish of His Soul. But in this, learn a lesson whereby to check impatience; for our Lord prayed thrice before He received any answer from His Father.

But at last, while the Lord Jesus prayed in agony, behold, the Angel of the Lord, perhaps the Prince of the Angelic Hosts, Michael, stood by Him, strengthening Him. We may regard him as thus addressing our Lord: "Hail, Lord Jesus; I have offered Thy prayer, and bloody sweat, before Thy Father, in the sight of the whole company of Heaven," and falling down before Him, the prayer is offered, 'let this

[1] Ps. xxii. 11. [2] Ps. lxix. 20, 21.

cup pass from Him.' And the Father answered, "Jesus, My most beloved Son, knows that the Redemption of the human race, which We so desire, cannot fittingly be brought about without the shedding of His Blood, and therefore, if He wills the salvation of souls, it behoveth Him to die for them. Which would you decide, then?" Then the Lord Jesus answered the Angel, "I will most strongly the salvation of souls, which the Father created after His image; I will, therefore, to die for them, rather than not to die Myself and for them to be lost. Therefore let the Father's will be done." And the Angel said to Him, "Be strong, then, and very courageous, for it is fitting that the Highest should do great things, and the most Valiant should endure hard things. Quickly will the suffering pass, and eternal glory succeed to it. The Father hath said, He will be always with Thee, and protect Thy mother and Thy disciples, and restore them to Thee safe and sound." And the lowly Jesus, reverently and humbly receives this encouragement from His own creature, considering that He was made a little lower than the angels, whilst He was in this miserable vale of darkness. And thus He was full of sadness, and comforted as man, and as man was willing to be commended to the Father, and aided by the Heavenly Court..

The Lord Jesus rises from prayer the third time, suffused with blood; behold Him wiping His face, or perhaps washing it in the stream; regard Him, I say, and be filled with a reverent grief, and let your inmost heart be moved by the sight of His afflictions; for without the intensest inward struggle this could not have occurred.

Some wise expounders of Scripture hold that our Lord Jesus prayed to the Father, not so much from the fear of suffering as from pity for His former people; because He had compassion for the Jews, who would be lost for having thus most cruelly put Him to death. For they certainly

ought not to have killed Him, Who was one of themselves, and observed their law, and wrought for them so many mercies, and prayed to the Father for their salvation, saying, "That the multitude of the Gentiles may believe, I refuse not to suffer; and if the Jews are to be blinded, that others may see, not My will, but Thine be done." For there was then in Christ a fourfold will; namely, a will of the body, and this by no means wanted to suffer; a will of sense, and this deplored and trembled; a will of reason, and this obeyed and gave consent; for in Isaiah it is said, "He was offered up, because it was His will."[1] And there was in Him the Will of Divinity, which commanded and dictated the decree of the Passion. Therefore, because He was true Man, as man He was brought into deep distress. Be moved, then, to pity Him deeply; and consider and see carefully all the actions and every affection of the Lord thy God.

Then He came to His disciples, and said to them, "Sleep on now, and take your rest;" for they had fallen asleep for a little while then; but the good Shepherd keepeth watch over His little flock. O grand love! Truly did He love them unto the end, when, being in such an agony Himself, He procured rest for them. He saw afar off His enemies coming with torches and weapons, yet He did not disturb His disciples, till they were quite near at hand; then He said to them, "It is enough; behold he is at hand that doth betray Me."[2]

And while He yet spake, the wicked Judas came before them—that basest trafficker—and kissed Him. It is said to have been the habit of Jesus, when He had sent out His disciples, to receive them with a kiss when they returned; and therefore it was that the traitor for a sign, through giving a kiss, betrayed Jesus, and, coming before the rest with a kiss, returned to Jesus, as though he said, "I am not

[1] Is. liii. 7. V. [2] S. Matt. xxvi. 46.

one of this armed band, but return as usual, and kiss Thee, saying, 'Hail, Master!'"

Behold, then, attentively the scene, and observe every movement of your Lord, and see how patiently and kindly He receives the embrace and kiss of the wretched traitor, whose feet He had so recently washed, and to whom He had given Heavenly Food. How does He suffer Himself to be taken, bound, smitten, madly hurried away, as if He were a malefactor, and wholly unable to defend Himself! How, too, does He compassionate His disciples, as they flee and are scattered! You can also contemplate their grief; how, sorrowfully sighing and groaning, as orphans overpowered by fear, they depart from Him; and how their distress is heightened when they see their Lord so cruelly dragged along; when they see these dogs hurrying Him off as the victim, and Him, as a most meek lamb, following them without resistance. Now look at Him, how He is dragged on by these most wretched men, from the brook up to Jerusalem, in haste and tumult, His Hands bound behind His Back, stripped of His garment, His remaining clothes in disorder, His Head uncovered, bent to the ground with weariness, and goaded on with excessive speed. And now they present Him before the chief priests Annas and Caiaphas, and the other elders who are gathered together with them; and they exult like a lion when he has taken his prey; they examine Him, they procure false witnesses, they condemn Him, they spit on His most sacred Face, blindfold Him, buffet Him, smite Him with the palms of their hands, saying, "Prophesy who is it that smote Thee?" They afflict Him with manifold insults, and He bears all with perfect patience. Behold Him in any one particular suffering, and pity Him.

At length the elders departed, and we can conceive that they put Jesus into a sort of dungeon, traces of which are

said to remain, and bound Him to a pillar of stone, and committed Him to the guard of armed men for greater safety, who occupied themselves throughout the night in deriding and cursing Him. Hear those daring and coarse revilers, saying, "Do you think you are better and wiser than our chiefs? What folly this is of yours! How can you dare to open your mouth against them? Their wisdom is evident, and now where is yours? They will doubtless condemn you to death, and you will undergo the sentence." And thus through the whole night, then one, then another, in deeds or words insult Him. No words can tell what passed that night, or what our Lord endured from the hands of those vile mercenaries. Behold Him, silently and humbly bearing all these insults, as though He deserved them, with downcast face, and compassionate Him deeply. O Lord, into whose hands hast Thou now come? What patience Thou manifestedst! Truly this is the hour of darkness.

And there our Lord remained till morning. Meanwhile we can imagine S. John going to the Blessed Virgin, and to the company of holy women, who were assembled in the house of Magdalen, where they perhaps had had the Supper; and relating all that had happened to our Lord and to His disciples. Then an indescribable scene of sorrow took place. Behold them, and excite pity for them; they are in terrible affliction, and deepest sorrow for their Beloved Lord, because now they fully realize and believe that He is going to die. Picture His mother, turning to the wall; imagine her praying. "O Father, most Adorable, most Gracious, most Merciful, I commend to Thee my most beloved Son. Thou canst not be cruel, for Thou, Eternal Father, art good to all. Wherefore should my Son Jesus die, for He hath never done amiss? Yet, O Just Father, if Thou willest the redemption of the world, may it not be, I pray Thee, brought about in another way,

for all things are possible to Thee? I pray Thee, Most Holy Father, if it be Thy will, may my Blessed Son Jesus be spared from dying, may He be delivered out of the hands of sinners, and restored to me. He, from obedience and reverence for Thee, will not exercise His power to rescue Himself. He has surrendered Himself, as one powerless and without knowledge, into their hands. Wherefore do Thou, O Lord, help Him." Such prayers, we might venture to imagine, the Blessed Virgin, with a true mother's love, would pour forth at this time, with all earnestness of supplication, and with intense bitterness of heart. Excite compassion as you see her now in such affliction.

CHAPTER LXXVI.

Meditation on the Passion of Christ for the First Hour.

Early in the morning, the chief men and rulers of the people returned, and caused the Hands of Christ to be bound behind His Back, saying, "Come, Thou robber, with us; come to judgment; to-day shall Thy evil deeds be put an end to, now shall Thy wisdom be known." And they led Him to Pilate; and He, as though a culprit, followed them, though He was the most innocent Lamb. But when His mother, John, and the holy women (for they had gone forth very early in the morning, that they might come to Him) met Him in the cross-road, and saw Him dragged away by so great a multitude, amidst so many reproaches and insults, they were filled with an indescribable sorrow; and this most bitter grief was mutual. For the Lord was deeply moved

by the affliction of His friends, and especially of His mother. For He knew that He was the cause of their grief, and that their souls were nearly sundered from their bodies through it. Contemplate, then, our Lord, and diligently consider every particular, for all is momentous and moving.

Christ, then, is led to Pilate; and these women follow afar off, for they are not able to be near. He is accused of many things, and then Pilate sent him to Herod. But Herod rejoiced at this, desirous of seeing a miracle wrought by Him; but He not only failed to obtain this, he did not get even a word from Him; and therefore he judged Him to be a fool, and having clothed Him in a white robe in derision, he sent Him back to Pilate. See how, not only as a malefactor, but as a fool, he was regarded by them all; but all this He bore with consummate patience. Behold Him, then, as He is led forward and backward, with downcast look, and lowly garb, hearing the shouts, reproaches, and mockeries of the populace; receiving now and then, perhaps, a blow from a stone, or some offensive and filthy missile. Regard, too, His mother and disciples, standing afar off in a state of unspeakable sorrow; and thence following Him. Then He is brought back to Pilate, those "dogs"[1] following up their charges against Him with great zeal and persistency; but Pilate, not finding any cause of death against Him, endeavoured to release Him. Thus he said, "I will chastise Him and let Him go." O Pilate, you chastise your Lord? Do you not know what you are doing? for He has done nothing worthy of death or of stripes; you would be acting rightly if, at His bidding, you chastised yourself. But, however, Pilate commanded that He should be most cruelly scourged.

Then the Lord was stripped of His clothes, and bound to a pillar, and in various ways scourged. He then, so comely

[1] Ps. xxii. 16.

and abashed, "fairer than the children of men," stands bare before them all; His flesh, most innocent and tender, most pure and lovely, receives the hard and cruel stripes from those most base men. The Flower of all flesh, the Flower of all humanity, is covered with blows and bruises. His Royal Blood flows forth on all sides, from His whole Body; wound upon wound, and lash upon lash, is added, until not only the scourgers but also the spectators were weary, and then He is ordered to be unbound. Tradition says the pillar had lasting marks of blood upon it.

Here, then, behold Him with a long and steady gaze, and if you feel no sorrow for Him, know that yours is a stony heart. Now was fulfilled what Isaiah the Prophet wrote: "When we saw Him, there was no form or comeliness that we should desire Him; we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted."[1] O Lord Jesus, who was it who was so daring, so rash, as to venture to strip Thee? who those, still more daring, who bound Thee? who those, most daring of all, who with such extreme cruelty scourged Thee? But Thou, Sun of Righteousness, didst withhold Thy rays; therefore all was darkness, and the power of darkness. All seem more powerful than Thou. Thy love and our sin have thus made Thee appear powerless. Accursed be our so great iniquity, for Thou hast all this to bear.

Then the Lord, having been loosened from the pillar, they lead Him, thus bare and bleeding, through the house, to find His poor garments, which were scattered hither and thither by his executioners. Regard Him, then, attentively, thus suffering, thus shuddering with pain and exposure. For the Gospel says it was cold. But when He would have put on His garments, perhaps some most impious men snatch at them, saying to Pilate, "Oh, sir, He made Himself

[1] Is. liii. 2, 4.

a King; let us dress Him as one, and crown Him with royal honour." Then they took a sort of robe of purple, and clothed Him with it, and they crowned Him with thorns. Behold Him, then, in every action, every suffering, for He does and suffers all they will. He wears the purple robe, He bears upon His Head the crown of thorns, He takes the reed into His Hand, while they bow the knee before Him, and salute Him as a king—He all the while holding His peace, and maintaining a most patient silence. Behold Him now in the bitterness of His heart, and most of all contemplate His Head crowned with thorns, and continually being struck with the reed. See how He receives the blows, with neck bowed down through extreme pain. For the thorns were very sharp, and pierced His most Sacred Head, which was consequently covered with blood. O wretches! How one day will that Royal Head appear awful to your sight, which you now are striking! For they mocked Him as one who had the will to reign, but not the power. But He bore all, for their cruelty was excessive; indeed, they seemed unable to satisfy their desire to put Him to pain, and thus they gathered together the whole band of soldiers. And they bring Him forth before the people and before Pilate himself, thus put to scorn, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Behold Him, then, for the sake of God, how He stands with face turned toward the ground, while the whole multitude shout and cry, "Crucify Him," mocking Him and scoffing at Him, as though they were wiser than He. See, too, how He deigns to appear without wisdom before the chief men and Pharisees, who seem now to have Him in their grasp, and are leading Him to a dreadful end. And thus not only pain and vengeance, but also reproaches, He suffered from them.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

Meditation on the Passion of Christ at the Third Hour.

THEN the whole multitude of the Jews require that He might be crucified, and thus He was condemned by that miserable judge, Pilate. His benefits, His mighty works, are all forgotten; His innocence does not move them; and what appears most cruel is, that after all that He has already suffered, they draw not back at the sight of His afflictions; nay, the chief men and elders are full of joy, that they can at last carry out their wicked design. They laugh, they mock Him, Who is the Very and Eternal God; they hasten on His death. They lead Him within, they despoil Him of the purple robe: He stands bare before them, hindered from re-clothing Himself. Attend here diligently, and consider His posture in every particular. And feel tenderly for Him; and that you may nourish the affection of compassion the more, avert your eyes a little while from His Divinity, and regard Him as simply man. You have before you a young man, most noble, comely, innocent, and loving, His whole body, bruised, discoloured, waled by the lash of the scourge, covered with blood, collecting His poor garments which are thrown hither and thither, clothing Himself with them, with bashfulness, recollection, and shame, at the presence of His persecutors who revile Him, as though He were the lowest of them, forsaken of God, and destitute of all human help. Look at Him with a fixed gaze, and you will be touched with

tenderness and compassion. Now He collects one garment, now another, as He clothes Himself anew with them. Now return to the thought of His Divinity; consider the Infinite, Eternal, Incomprehensible, and Royal Majesty, made Flesh, bending lowly to the ground, and collecting His garments and clothing Himself with modesty and reverence, as though the meanest of men, yea, a slave with no rights, and simply in their power, corrected and chastised by them for some offence. Behold Him, then, attentively, and be filled with amazement at His lowliness, and compassionate Him in a similar manner, when you see Him bound to the pillar and scourged beyond all limit. When re-clothed, they lead Him forth, not to defer His death any longer; they lay upon His shoulders the venerable wood of the Cross, long, thick, and weighty, which the most meek Lamb patiently received and carried. Tradition says the cross was fifteen feet high. He is dragged, hurried along, overwhelmed with revilings, as before we saw Him at the First Hour. He was led along with His companions, the two thieves.

Behold, this is His society! O good Jesus! What shame do these companions cause Thee; they associate Thee with robbers. They even treat Thee worse than they treat them; for they lay on Thee the heavy cross, which they are not said to do to them. Thus not only, as Isaiah says, "He was numbered with the transgressors,"[1] but He was counted worse than they. Indescribable, O Lord, is Thy patience!

Contemplate, then, our Lord carefully, how with bent form He carries His cross, and how fearfully exhausted He is through want of breath. Feel all possible pity for Him, in such distress, at every renewal of insult. And because His mother, full of sorrow, on account of the crowd could not

[1] Is. liii. 12.

get near Him, nor get to see Him, she, with John and her friends, may, we can imagine, have taken a shorter road, that, being before the rest at the point where He would pass, she might be able to approach Him. But when beyond the gate of the city, where the roads meet, she perhaps came in His path, and saw Him bearing the heavy cross, she was half dead with sorrow, and became speechless; nor yet could the Lord address her, for He was hurried along by those who led Him to be crucified. But, proceeding a little further, Christ turned to the weeping women, and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for Me, but weep for yourselves," etc., as in the Gospel is fully related. Where these events are said to have occurred, there are remains of Churches, which some state as a matter of memory. Mount Calvary, where Christ was crucified, is distant from the gate of the city, about as far as our place is from the gate of S. Germanus; so that the cross had to be borne a long way. When, then, He had gone a little further, He became so fatigued and cramped with carrying the cross, that He laid it down. Then, those most vile men, disliking to defer His death, fearing, too, lest Pilate should revoke the sentence—for He had displayed vacillation—compelled a certain one to bear His cross; but Him, thus unburdened, they led as a robber bound to the place of Calvary. Do not, then, these sufferings, which He endured, at the matin, at the first and the third hours, seem to you, apart from the Crucifixion, to have been most violent and bitter afflictions, fearful and dreadful indeed? Yes, I think so, and fitted to call out our compassion for Him, and to excite intense grief. Thus, we seem to have completed what we have to say for the present concerning the sufferings of our Lord at these three points of time. Let us now turn to those events which happened at the sixth and ninth hours, His Cruci-

fixion and Death. Then we will afterwards consider what took place after His Death, at evening time, and at the close of the day.[1]

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

Meditation on the Passion of Christ at the Sixth Hour.

When the Lord Jesus, conducted by these wicked men, arrived at that foul place, Calvary, you may depict to yourself the scene of activity which those sinful men displayed on all sides. Gather yourselves up by a great effort of mind, that you may be present at and realize everything which is done against your Lord, and all that is said or done by Him, or at His instance. Behold, then, with your mind's eye some fixing the Cross into the ground, others preparing the nails and hammers, others getting the ladder with other implements ready for use; some, indeed, taking the direction of what was being done, others meanwhile stripping our Lord of His raiment. For He was stripped and made bare now for the third time before the multitude, and His Wounds were reopened because His garments had stuck to His Flesh. What a sight was this for His mother, when her Son was thus prepared to undergo death—sad, indeed, beyond measure. We can imagine that she would long to draw near and embrace Him or cover Him. O what bitter-

[1] These meditations are arranged according to the Canonical Hours. We have marked the points of time, without using the *names* of "the Hours," so that the meditations may be employed by those not familiar with them.

ness of soul! No help can be given, no; for they are dragging her Son with fury to the foot of the Cross.

Now diligently behold the process of Crucifixion. Two ladders are accustomed to be placed, one on the one side, the other on the other; upon these, wicked men go up, with nails and hammers; while another ladder is placed in front, reaching to that part of the Cross where the feet are to be nailed. Contemplate now each event. Our Lord may have been compelled by means of this small ladder to ascend the Cross, for He does whatsoever they bid Him, humbly, without resistance or complaint. Having reached the top of the ladder, He turns Himself round, it may be, opens His arms, and extends His Hands—so royal and beautiful—and yields Himself up to His crucifiers.

He looks up to Heaven, and addresses His Father: "Lo, here I am, My Father; Thou willedst that I should humble Myself, even to the death of the Cross, for the love and salvation of the human race. I accept it, and for them I offer Myself to Thee, whom Thou hast given Me, and whom Thou hast willed should be My brethren. Accept, then, O Father, My offering; be it propitious in Thy Sight from love for Me; blot out all their old stains of sin, and set them free from them. Father, I offer Myself for them to Thee."

Then he who was behind the Cross, took His Right Hand, and nailed it firmly to the Cross; which being done, the other on the other side took His Left Hand, stretched It as far as possible, puts another nail to It, sticks and fastens It to the Cross. After this, they descend from the ladders, and remove them. The Lord hangs down by the weight of His Body, supported only by the nails through His Hands. Nevertheless, another comes up, and draws down His Body by His Feet with all his might, and holds them, whilst another drives a nail most cruelly through them.

Some think that another method was employed in crucifying our Lord: that they laid the Cross on the ground, and there nailed Him to it, and then raised it, and fixed it in the ground. If you are drawn to conceive of the crucifixion after this manner, behold how they rush upon Him contemptuously, as though a most vile person; and, mad with passion, cast Him down upon the Cross upon the ground, laying hold of His Arms, and cruelly stretching them in opposite directions, and so fastened them with all vengeance to it. In like manner, behold what they did with His Feet, which they dragged down most violently.

Behold, the Lord Jesus is crucified, and so stretched upon the Cross, that "all His bones might be told," as He complains by His Prophet. On all sides streams of the most Sacred Blood flow from those large wounds. So bound is He that He is unable to move any member save His Head. Those three nails bear the whole weight of His Body. He suffers most bitter pain, beyond all description or thought. He hangs between two thieves; on all sides, tortures, revilings, reproaches; for, in all His anguish, they did not refrain from reproaches. Some blaspheme, saying, "Ah, Thou that destroyest the Temple." Others, indeed, cried out, "Himself He cannot save," and similar expressions of derision. "If He be the Son of God, let Him come down from the Cross, and we will believe Him." And the soldiers, also, who crucified Him, divided His garments in His presence.

And all this, haply, is said and done in the presence of His most sorrowful mother, whose sympathy with Him much augmented His sorrow. She would wish, indeed, in her sympathy, to hang with Him on the Cross, and would rather die with Him than live any longer. Anguish is on all sides; such misery as might be felt, but cannot be told. His mother stood by the Cross in the midst, and turned not her eyes from her Son; she was afflicted with Him, and prayed

doubtless to the Father most fervently: "O Father and God Eternal, it is Thy will that my Son should be crucified. I cannot now desire it to be otherwise, but you see the bitter anguish of His soul; wherefore I pray You, ease His sufferings, if it be Thy will." And the Son, we may believe, similarly prayed for her: "Father, behold My afflicted mother. I ought thus to suffer, but not she; yet in her sympathy she is united with me in the Cross. It is enough that I should be crucified, because I bear the sins of all the people, but her sufferings can have no like merit. Behold her desolate, and worn out with all this grief. I commend her to Thee; make her sorrow more bearable."

There were near the Cross, with the Blessed Virgin, John and Magdalen, and the two sisters of Mary; namely, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome, and perhaps others also; all of whom, and especially that beloved disciple of Jesus, Magdalen, wept bitterly: nor could they be comforted for their beloved Lord and Master; they suffered with Him, with His mother, and with each other. Again and again was their sorrow renewed, for their compassion was unceasingly called forth, when some new reproach or suffering was added to the Passion of their Lord.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

Meditation on the Passion of our Lord at the Ninth Hour.

But our Lord, whilst hanging upon the Cross, even to the departure of His spirit, was not idle, but did and spake that which was for our instruction. Whence He spake seven words, which are to be found recorded in the Gospel.

The first word was uttered, in the very act of crucifixion, when He prayed for His crucifiers, saying, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."[1] Which word affords us a striking instance of patience and of love, yes, of unspeakable charity.

The second word was to His mother, when He said, "Woman, behold Thy son!" and to John, "Behold thy mother!"[2] He did not call her mother, lest, through the extreme tenderness of her love, the name itself should make her grieve the more.

The third word was addressed to the penitent thief, when He said, "To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise."[3]

The fourth word was, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?"—that is, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"[4] As if He said, "Thou, Father, didst so love the world, that, while Thou hast delivered Me up for it, Thou seemest to have forsaken Me."

The fifth word was when He said, "I thirst."[5] Which word excited great pity on the part of His mother and her companions, and John; and called forth great joy on the part of wicked and cruel men. For though the word might be explained of a spiritual thirst for the salvation of souls; yet, in truth, He endured bodily thirst from loss of blood, whereby He was dried within and quite parched. And when those wretched men were at a loss to know by what means they might do Him some new injury, they invented from this saying a fresh mode of tormenting Him. Wherefore they gave Him vinegar to drink, mingled with gall. Accursed be their wrath, for it was insatiable; for they afflicted Him in every way in which they could.

The sixth word was, "It is finished;"[6] as if to say, "Father, the law of obedience, which Thou gavest Me, I have per-

[1] S. Luke xxiii. 36. [2] S. John xix. 26, 27. [3] S. Luke xxiii. 43.
[4] S. Matt. xxvii. 46. [5] S. John xix. 28. [6] Ibid. 30.

fectly fulfilled. Still, whatever now Thou wouldst order Me, Thy Son, order Me, and I am ready to accomplish whatever may remain. For I am prepared for stripes.[1] But all that was written of Me is finished; if it please Thee, O Father, recall Me to Thyself." Then we can imagine the Father to reply, "Come, My most beloved Son. Thou hast done all things well; I will not that Thou be afflicted any further. Come; for I will receive Thee in My Bosom, and will embrace Thee." And from that moment He began to droop, as dying people do, now closing, now opening His Eyes; and He inclined His Head, now this way, now that, all strength failing Him.

At last He adds the seventh word, with a loud cry and tears, saying to His Father, "Father, into Thy Hands I commend My spirit;[2]" and saying this, He gave up the ghost, and with His Head bowed upon His Breast, as if giving thanks to the Father for that He called Him back to Himself, He committed His spirit into His Hands. At this cry, the centurion was converted, who was near, and said, "Truly this was the Son of God," when He heard Him cry at the very moment of death. For other men at the time of death are unable to cry out, and therefore He believed in Him. Great, indeed, was that cry, heard even in Hell. Oh, what then were the feelings of His mother, when she saw Him thus painfully fail, sink, weep, and die! I judge that she must have been as one in a trance and unconscious, from the multitude of her troubles, or have become half dead; much more so now, than when she saw Him bearing His Cross. What now did faithful Magdalen, that beloved disciple? What did John, beloved above all? What did the two sisters of Mary? What, indeed, could they do, steeped in grief, overwhelmed with sorrow, stupefied as with bitterest gall? They all wept, without any remedy for their grief.

[1] Ps. xxxvii. 18. V.

[2] S. Luke xxiii. 46.

Behold, then, the Lord hangs dead upon the Cross; the multitude leaves the heights of Calvary; the mournful mother remains with those four, and sits at the foot of the Cross. They contemplate the Beloved One; they wait for help from the Lord, to know how to get Him restored to them, and to bury Him. And you, if you have with fixed attention gazed upon your Lord, can tell how, from the sole of the Foot, even to His Head, there is no soundness in Him; there is no member, no sense, which has not endured some great pain or injury. Here, then, you have, indeed, enough on the Crucifixion and Death of our Lord, which happened at the sixth and ninth hours; sufficient, indeed, for our little knowledge and experience. But strive devoutly, faithfully, and carefully to give yourself to meditate upon this. For concerning the events which followed upon His Death we will now speak.

CHAPTER LXXX.

Of the Opening of the Side of Christ.

Whilst the Blessed Virgin and John, Magdalen and the sisters of Mary, remained and sat on one side near the Cross, and gazed unceasingly on the Lord Jesus, hanging thus upon the Cross between the thieves, so bare, so afflicted, dead, and forsaken by all; behold, many armed soldiers came from the city towards them, who had been sent to break the legs of those who were crucified, and thus to kill, and then to bury them, so that their bodies may not remain upon the crosses on the great day of the Sabbath. Then Mary and all rise and look at them, wondering what is going to take place; and thus their grief is renewed, and

their fear and trembling increased. Much, indeed, did His mother fear what was going to be done to her dead Son. We can depict her, turning to Him and saying, "O most Beloved Son, what more do they want to do to Thee? have not they killed Thee? I know not what more they can do. Oh, that I might be able to protect Thee now, dead, though I could not, when living. O Heavenly Father, be merciful and shield us. And all weeping came, and took up their position in front of the Cross. Then the soldiers came up with fury and violence, and seeing that the thieves were still alive, brake their legs and killed them, and taking down their bodies from the crosses, perhaps pitched them into some ditch. And then they came to our Lord Jesus. His mother, being moved with deep affliction, resorted to her usual arms of defence, deep humility; she fell, it may be, on her knees, beseeching the soldiers, with tears streaming down her cheeks, in the name of the Most High, not to do any injury to her son. "I am a mother in deep distress, and I have never committed any offence or injury, for which I should suffer this. And if my Son has seemed to you to have done amiss, you have already put Him to death; therefore now be merciful. Do not touch His Body now, that it may remain intact for burial. He is dead already. There is no need to break his legs." John, Magdalen, the sisters, all wept most bitterly. "Oh, what shall we do? Cast yourself before these most wretched men, and implore them; see if you cannot influence and bend them by piety and lowliness!" But humility is an abomination to the proud;—you labour in vain.

Then one, said to be named Longinus, at that time impious and proud, but afterwards a penitent, a martyr, and a saint, stretching forth his spear at a distance, notwithstanding the cries and entreaties of the holy women, plunged it into the right Side of our Lord Jesus, making a

great gash, from which flowed water and blood. The mother of Jesus was stupefied with grief at this sight, and remained upheld by the arms of Magdalen. John, perhaps, was stirred by his sorrow to inveigh against this act. "Infamous men, know you not that He is dead already? wish you to pierce His mother's heart and to kill her with grief? Begone, that we may bury Him." Then, as God willed, they departed.

Then the Blessed Mother arose out of her grief, to inquire what further they had done. Death seemed to touch her, as often as any new indignity was offered to her Son. Then, indeed, were Simeon's words fulfilled: "A sword shall pierce through thine own soul also." For surely the same lance pierced the Body of the Son, and the soul of the mother. And all again placed themselves at the foot of the Cross, not knowing what to do. For they could not take down the Body and bury It, not having sufficient strength nor instruments to do so. They dare not depart and leave Him hanging there, neither could they remain there when night drew on. You see in what great perplexity they were. O God, how dost Thou permit Thine elect to be so afflicted, especially her, the chosen one of all, a mirror of virtues and consolation! But it is time to pause, and take breath a little.

CHAPTER LXXXI.

Meditation for the Evening Hour.

Again, they descry in the distance the forms of other persons who are approaching them; these were Joseph of Arimathæa and Nicodemus, bringing with them others, bearing tools, by which they might take down the Body from the

Cross; and carrying with them a hundred pounds' weight of myrrh and aloes, for they were coming to bury our Lord. Then they all rise up once more in great terror. O God, what affliction do they endure this day! But John, looking round, recognized Joseph and Nicodemus. Then the Blessed Virgin, recovering strength, says, "Blessed be our God, Who sends us help; He has been mindful of us, and has not deserted us. Run, my son, to meet them." Then John ran to meet them, and upon reaching them, they embrace each other with great weeping, being unable for an hour to hold any converse, from their deep compassion, and excess of grief and weeping: afterwards they come in front of the Cross. Joseph makes inquiries about the companions of the Blessed Virgin, and of what has become of the other disciples. And he replies, that he does not know where the disciples are, and that they had not been there that day. He further asked what had been done to our Lord, and John described all that had taken place. But when they came to the foot of the Cross, they bent the knee and worshipped our Lord. Then approaching the Blessed Mother and her companions, they were reverently received with appropriate gestures, bending to the ground, and continuing together in silence for a long while. At length, perhaps, the Virgin spake, saying, "You do well in remembering your Master, Who loved you so greatly; and I confess that your arrival has given me new light, for we knew not what to do. May the Lord reward you!" Then they answered, "We grieve with our whole heart for all that has been done against Him. For the wicked have overwhelmed the Just One; gladly would we have delivered Him out of their hands, had we been able. This little service, at least, we will render to our Lord and Master." Whereupon they arose, and made ready to take down the Body of Jesus.

But do you, as I have so often enjoined, with diligence and fixity of gaze, watch the mode of taking down the Body of Christ. Two ladders, we may assume, are placed on the opposite sides of the Cross. Joseph ascends one of the ladders and tries to draw out the nail from Christ's Hand. But this it is difficult to do, because the nail is thick and long, and deeply imbedded in the wood, and without greatly bruising the hand of our Lord it does not seem able to be done. But he would employ no rude force, for he acted reverently, and thus our Lord graciously accepted his service. As soon as one was drawn out, John, it may be, made signs to Joseph that he should pass to him the nail, anxious to save the Blessed Virgin Mother the pain of seeing it. Then Nicodemus extracted the other nail, and gave it in the same way to John. Then Nicodemus came down and came to the nail in His Feet: Joseph meanwhile upholding the Body of our Lord. Happy, indeed, he who is thus privileged! Then, perchance, the Virgin reverently took the Right Hand as it hung down, and pressed it to her mouth, contemplating it and kissing it with strong crying and dolorous sighs. The nail in the Feet having been drawn out, Joseph descended a little, and all receive the Body of the Lord, and lay It on the ground. His mother receives His Sacred Head and rests It on her bosom, and Magdalen His feet—those Feet, at which she once found such grace! Others stand around: all make great mourning over Him, for their mourning is most bitter, as that of one who mourneth for his only son.

CHAPTER LXXXII.

Meditation for the Last Hour.

After some delay, when night drew on, Joseph asks the Blessed Virgin to allow the Sacred Body to be wrapped in linen clothes and buried. Perhaps she withstood this request, saying, "Oh, my friends, do not wish to take the Body of my Son so quickly out of my sight, or let me be buried with Him." But she wept inconsolably; beholding the Wounds in His Hands and Side, seeing, too, the marks of the thorns, His dead Face, His torn beard, His Face besmeared with spittle and with blood as she looked at His features, now this way, now that; nor could she cease to gaze, nor cease to weep. As to the plucking of the beard, Scripture itself bears testimony to the truth of it, for Isaiah says, "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair."[1] His mother saw all this, and wished to have time to dwell on all. But, it was getting late, and so John said, "Lady, let us accede to the request of Joseph and Nicodemus, and permit them to prepare the Body of our Lord for burial; by too long delay It may receive some fresh insult from the Jews." At this saying, we can imagine, the Virgin, full of gratitude and prudence, remembering that she had been committed to the care of John by her Son, withdrawing her refusal; and, with words of blessing, permitting His sacred Body to be wrapped in the linen, as it was the custom of the Jews so to bury. Then His mother held His Head and composed It for burial, as Magdalen did His Feet. For Magdalen may have

[1] Is. l. 6.

asked that this part of the preparation for burial might be given to her, saying, "Grant me, I pray you, that I may arrange the Feet, for at these it was that I found mercy." Her request was vouchsafed her, and she reverently held His Feet. Her sorrow at that moment seemed to cause her strength to fail her, and those Feet, once by her bedewed with tears of compunction, were now again bathed with a flood of tears of sorrow and compassion. As she gazed upon those Feet, wounded, bruised, shrivelled, blood-stained, she wept most bitterly. For, as the truth itself testifies, "she loved much;[1]" therefore she wept much, and especially at those mournful obsequies of her Lord and Master, afflicted, scourged, wounded, dead, and reduced, as it were, to nothing. She could scarcely contain herself for sorrow; her heart was breaking. She knew of no remedy, and this office she was helping to perform was one unfamiliar to her. It was a new and a last duty she had now to perform, and in performing it her soul was bitterly afflicted, because she could not do it so precisely nor recollectedly as she desired. She would have washed, and anointed, and carefully arranged His sacred Form, but neither time nor place permitted her to carry out these desires. She could not do more; she could not do differently: she did what she could. At least, she was able to wash His Feet, to embrace and kiss them, to wrap them up, and arrange them carefully, according to the best of her knowledge and ability. All having been done, they turn to the Virgin Mother, as if to see what more should be done, and give vent to their sorrow. Then, seeing there could be no more delay, the mother haply kissed her dearest Son's face, and said, "O my Son, I hold Thee dead, to my breast; bitter indeed, bitter is this parting; pleasant and lovely was life in fellowship with Thee, without offence or harm to others; and yet, O sweetest Son, Thou

[1] S. Luke vii. 47.

hast been slain as if an evil-doer. Faithfully, O my Son, have I served Thee, and Thou me; but in Thy bitter struggle, it was not Thy Father's Will to help Thee, and I had no power. Thou hast given up Thyself for love of the human race, whom Thou wouldst redeem. Hard, indeed, and painful was that work of Redemption, in which I rejoice, for it accomplished man's salvation. However, in Thy Sorrows and Death I am sharply afflicted; for I know that Thou never sinnedst; and that without a cause, as far as Thyself is concerned, Thou didst endure a most painful and shameful death. Now, then, my Son, our companionship is broken; and from Thee I must be separated. I, Thy most mournful mother, will bury Thee, but afterwards whither shall I go? Where shall I stay, my Son? How can I live without Thee? Would I not willingly be buried with Thee, that wherever you are I might be? But though not in body, yet in mind, let me be buried with Thee; let my soul be buried in the tomb with Thy Body: to Thee I commit it, to Thee resign it. O my Son, how bitter is this separation!" We can picture her tears falling upon His Face, even more copiously than those of Magdalen upon His Feet. Then she washed His Face, and wrapped His Head in the napkin, and carefully fastened it. Then, again, a second time were words of blessing uttered. And all knelt down in adoration; and kissing His Feet, lifted his Body and bore It to the sepulchre—the mother at His Head, Magdalen at His Feet, the rest bearing the Body between them. The sepulchre was near the place of crucifixion, but a short distance off, where they reverently laid Him, with bended knees, with great lamentation, loud sobbings, and bitter cries. His mother, with words full of blessing, again embraced Him, and stooped over Him, and fain would have remained by the Body of her dear Son. But they removed her, and placed a great stone at the door of the sepulchre. Bede

says, the tomb was round and excavated, formed out of the rock, of some height, so that a man could just reach the top with his hand, and that it had an entrance from the east: but that the side where the Lord's Body was placed was towards the north, cut out of the same rock, and seven feet in length.

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

Meditation at Night.

But Joseph, wishing to return to the city, after he had finished this last duty, says to the Blessed Virgin, "O lady, I beseech you for God's sake, and for the love of your Son and my Master, if it please you, to withdraw to my house, for I know that you have not one of your own; use mine as your own, for all is at your disposal; and Nicodemus said the same. O what compassion! The most exalted of all creatures has not where to lay her head, and must pass those days of bitterness and widowhood under another's roof. Truly those were days of widowhood, because Jesus was all to her—her Lord, Son, Spouse, Father and Mother, all in one, and in losing Him she lost all. Truly was she then a widow and forsaken, not having whither to turn. Then she bowed humbly, giving thanks to them, and replied that she was committed to the care of John. And when they still continued to question her, John answered, that he wished to take her to Mount Zion, to the house in which his Master supped the evening before, with His disciples, and there to abide with her. Then they, bowing and worshipping at the Sepulchre, retired; and the rest, as the Gospel states, remained sitting over against the

Sepulchre. But as night drew on, John said to the Blessed Virgin, "It is not fitting that we should continue here too long, or return into the city at night; and therefore, if you please, let us go away." Then the mother, rising and bending the knee, embraces the Sepulchre, uttering words of blessing: "My Son, since I can no longer stay with Thee, I commend Thee to Thy Father." Then with eyes raised to heaven, and with tears and intense affection, she says, "O Eternal Father, I commend to Thy care my Son, and with Him I commend my soul, which I resign to Thee." Then they began to depart. But when they came to the Cross, she there knelt and said, "Here my Son departed, here He poured forth His most precious Blood." And the others did likewise. For we may well believe that His mother was the first to make an act of devotion at the Cross. They then went into the city, though again and again she turned to look behind her. And when they came to a point, after which the Sepulchre and Cross were beyond their sight, she turned and knelt devoutly, as also did the rest. And when they came upon the entrance to the city, the sisters of Mary veiled her as a widow, covering, so to speak, her whole face, and preceded her, whilst she followed between John and Magdalen, in a most mournful condition. Then perhaps Magdalen, wishing, upon entering into the city, to take the way which led to her house, and to lead them there, made arrangements accordingly, and said, "O lady, I pray you, for love of my Master, to come to my house, for that is the best course; for you know how He liked to come to it. It is your own—all I have is yours; I beseech you, come." Then they again began to weep. But the Virgin Mother kept silence, and made signs to John, and Magdalen continued her entreaties. But he said, "It is more fitting that we should go to Mount Zion, chiefly because there we shall be better able to meet

with our friends. Do you go with us thither." Magdalen replied, "You know well that I will accompany her wherever she goes, and never leave her." On entering the city, a number of virgins and good matrons come to meet her, as soon as they know that she has arrived, and join themselves to her to comfort her, but great was their lamentation. Also some good men compassionated her, as they passed amongst them, and were moved to tears, saying, "This was, indeed, a great injustice, which was done to-day by our rulers against the Son of this lady; and God for Him has wrought great miracles; let them be careful what they are doing."

But when they arrived at the house, then the Virgin Mother, turning herself towards those good women who had gone with her, bade them adieu, thanking them for their sympathy, and bowing to them most courteously. And they in turn inclined themselves and reverently departed, making great lamentation. Then Mary went into the house, and Magdalen and her two sisters. But John stood at the door, and desired the rest to retire to their own homes, for the hour was late; and, thanking them, he shut the door. Then the Blessed Virgin, looking round the house, exclaimed, "O my sweetest Son, where art Thou; I can see Thee no longer here? O John, where is my Son? O Magdalen, where is thy Father, who so tenderly loved thee? O beloved sisters, where is my Son? Our joy, our sweetness, the light of our eyes; He has gone from us, with what anguish you know well. This it is which intensifies our grief, when I think of Him covered with wounds, filled with bitterness, parched with thirst, goaded, oppressed, afflicted, unable to be helped; all forsook Him, even the Almighty Father did not will to support Him. And how quickly, too, all these sufferings followed one upon another, you yourselves saw. What vile criminal was

ever condemned with such haste, and violent cruelty? O my Son, at night wast Thou taken, and treacherously betrayed; at the third hour wast Thou condemned, and at the sixth crucified, and thus Thou didst die! O Son, how bitter is this parting from Thee, and the memory of Thy most shameful death!" At last, John asked her to desist, and consoled her. Do you, as far as possible, be present at this scene, and unite in spirit with John in those ministries of consolation and reflection which followed, that you may receive a heavenly blessing, and then retire.

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

Meditation on the Blessed Virgin and her Companions.

On the morning of the Sabbath they remained within, with closed doors—the Blessed Virgin, her companions, and John, in deep affliction, as orphaned children, hardly speaking a word, but sitting together and absorbed in the thought of what had passed. Now and then they raised their faces for a moment and glanced at each other, as people do when suffering from some great and overwhelming calamity. A knock, we may imagine, is heard at the door, and they are thereby filled with fear and apprehension, and all security seemed gone. However, John went to the door, and on opening it discovered Peter; and turning to those who were within, said, "It is Peter." The Blessed Virgin said at once, "Admit him." Whereupon Peter entered, suffused with shame, weeping and sobbing greatly; and this renewed the grief of all, who wept in silence. Then the other disciples,

one after another, came to the house, weeping. At length, subduing their grief, they began to speak of their Lord. Then Peter says, "I am ashamed of myself; I ought not to speak in your presence, nor to appear before men, because I forsook and denied my Lord, Who loved me so greatly." The rest also smote their breasts, and wept, charging themselves with leaving their sweetest Lord. Then the Virgin Mother says, "The Good Master and Faithful Shepherd has left us, and we remain as orphans; but I firmly trust that we shall soon have Him again; you know how gracious He is, and how dearly He loves you all. Doubt not that He will be gracious and forgive every offence or fault freely. But so great was their fury—permitted by the Eternal Father—against Him, and to such a pitch did they carry their malice and daring, that you could not have helped Him, whatever you had done. Therefore do not be disturbed." "Indeed, lady," replied Peter, "it is as you say. For I, who saw the beginnings of things, was so overcome with terror in the hall of Caiaphas, that I hardly thought I should have been able to escape their vengeance, and so I denied Him. I did not remember the words of warning, by which He foretold me of this, till His Face was turned upon me." Then Magdalen asked about the warnings, and he told all about them, and his denial of his Master, adding other circumstances which he related to her, and what had passed at the Paschal Supper. Then says the Blessed Virgin, "I wish to hear of those things which were said and done at this Supper by Him." Then Peter makes signs to John, that he would tell her. And John begins and narrates the whole; and thus they all conversed together about what our Lord had done. First one, and then another, has something to say, and thus the day passed. O how attentively did Magdalen listen! And Mary was more

attentive still. How often, during the relation of His words and actions, did she exclaim, "Blessed be my Son, Jesus!"

Regard them, then, diligently, and compassionate them, for their affliction is great—yes, as great as can be conceived. For what is it to see the most blessed of all creatures in heaven and earth, and the princes of Churches and of all peoples, the leaders of the whole divine army, thus shut up in a little room, and timorous, not knowing what to do, save only to comfort one another, conversing together on the actions and sayings of their dearest Lord. Yet the Blessed Virgin maintained a calm and peaceful mind, for she had most sure hope of the Resurrection of her Son; in her alone faith held its ground on that Sabbath, and this is commemorated on Saturdays. Nevertheless, she could not feel joyful at the death of her sweetest Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

But in the evening, after the sun was set, when work was permitted, Mary Magdalen and the other Mary went to buy spices, with which to make ointments. Late, too, the evening before, when they returned from the sepulchre of our Lord, they began preparations, and continued them till sunset; afterwards they ceased. For the Sabbath had to be observed from sunset on Friday till sunset on the following day. Now, then, they are going forth to buy the spices. Behold them attentively, as they go with mournful countenances, like widows, and apply at the shop for the spices, kept, it may be, by some devoted person who takes pity on them, and grants them at once all they require. They want spices, and the best they can get; and having paid for them they return, and begin to make ready the ointments for their Lord. Regard them diligently, how humbly, how devoutly, and faithfully they labour for their Lord, with much weeping and deep sighing. But the Blessed

Virgin and the Apostles look on, and perhaps offer them help. And thus the day ended, and they go to rest. This, then, is the meditation for Holy Saturday, upon the Virgin Mother, her companions, and the disciples.

CHAPTER LXXXV.

Meditation on the Lord Jesus, on Holy Saturday, descending into Hell.

Now we must consider what the Lord did on the day of the Sabbath. Immediately upon His Death He descended into Hell, to the Holy Fathers, and remained with them. Were they not then in glory—for the sight of the Lord is perfect glory? Consider, then, here, and observe what kindness, what charity, what lowliness, Christ showed in going down into Hell. For He might have sent one of His angels to them, and freed all His servants, and then vouchsafed His Presence when He pleased. But His infinite love and humility would not have been satisfied with this course; therefore He went down Himself, and visited them, not as servants, but as friends, though He was Lord of all, and abode with them even till Sunday dawned. Think, then, of these things; admire, and strive to imitate the virtues which are manifested. The Holy Fathers rejoiced, indeed, at His Advent, and were filled with immense sweetness; all disquietude was at once expelled; and they continued to sing canticles of praise and joy before Him, upon which you may meditate in this manner. Imagine them, as if clothed with bodies such as shall be theirs after the Resurrection,

and likewise that most benign Soul of our Lord Jesus Christ. For as soon as they felt His saving Advent, they met Him joyously, exhorting one another, and saying, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He hath visited and redeemed His people,"[1] and the rest. "Lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh,"[2] "Arise, arise, O Jerusalem; loose thyself from the bands of thy neck."[3] "Behold, thy Saviour cometh, to loose us from our chains." "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in,"[4] We adore Thee, O Christ, and we bless Thee, our most loving God. And falling down, they worshipped Him, with joy and great gladness. But consider them, for with reverence and great exultation, and joyful countenances, they stand before Him, and give utterance to such praises as we have named. And in similar praises, canticles, and songs, they continued in those borders till nearly daybreak on Sunday. A multitude of angels, we can conceive, would join them in their jubilations. Then the Lord led them forth from hell with triumph, going before them gloriously, and placed them in a Paradise of delights. After which, He remained with them a brief space, it may be in sweet converse with Elias and Enoch, who recognized Him, and then He said, "It is time that I raise My Body; I will go and resume it." Whereupon all fell on their faces, and said, "Go, O Lord, King of Glory, and return quickly, if Thou willest; for we long to see Thy most glorious Body."

You have, then, matter for meditation, on the Lord Jesus, His mother and disciples, and the Holy Fathers, for the Saturday in Holy Week. Now, as I have run through the entire history of the Passion, without adding quotations, for fear that by doing so I might have called off the mind's

[1] S. Luke i. 68.
[2] S. Luke xxi. 28.
[3] Is. lii. 2.
[4] Ps. xxiv. 7.

attention from the great theme; I now propose to add a few authorities, by which to stir up our spirit to a more fervent and devout meditation. Hear, then, according to our wont, what S. Bernard says. "You owe," says he, "all your life to Jesus Christ, because He laid down His life for you, and endured such bitter torments, lest you should have to suffer eternally. For if all the days of the sons of Adam, and all ages, or all the labours of men who ever have been or shall be, were gathered into one, yet would such bear no comparison in moral worth to that Body, which is beautiful and wonderful, even in the sight of heavenly intelligences, in its conception by the Holy Ghost, in its Birth of a Virgin, in its innocency of life, in the affluence of its teaching, in the coruscation of its miracles, in the revelation of Sacraments. For as heaven is higher than earth, so is His Life above ours. In fact, there is no possibility of instituting any comparison between terms which are so distant, for no life is more worthy than His, none more miserable than ours. When, then, I dedicate to Him all that is in my power, it bears in comparison with His self-sacrifice, the proportion of a star to the sun, of a drop to a river, of a stone to a mountain, of a grain to a bushel." And again, "The 'emptying' of Christ of His glory was not a solitary act, or one of limited character; on the contrary, He humbled Himself to the flesh, to death, to the Cross. Who can ever form an adequate estimate of His lowliness, His meekness, His condescension—a God of Majesty, to be clothed with flesh, to be punished by death, to endure the shame of the Cross? But, shall we say, the Creator was not able to mend His work, without resorting to such extreme measures? He was able, but He preferred to suffer Himself, lest there should be any longer occasion or excuse for man's ingratitude, a vice most odious and base. Truly, He embraced much fatigue, so that, through His great love,

He might make man a debtor; and that the very difficulty of His Redemptive Work might move man to gratitude, whose creation through its facility had failed to call it forth. For what did man, created and unthankful, in effect say? 'I have been made, it is true, but my creation cost my Maker nothing, no toil, no labour. He only spake the word, and I was made, and all else besides me.'"[1] And further on, "'But the mouth of those that speak evil shall be stopped.' It is clearer than the day now, O man, what thou hast cost thy God. From the Lord to become a servant, from the rich poor, from the Word the flesh, from the Son of God the Son of man, He disdained not. Remember, if at no cost He made, He did not at no cost redeem thee. In six days He made all things, and thee among them. But for the whole of thirty years, He laboured for thy salvation in this earth. O how did He labour, bearing the necessities of the flesh, and the temptations of the enemy! He could not intensify any further the shame which He endured on the Cross; He could not heighten the honour of His Death." And again, "That which makes Thee lovable to me, O good Jesus, is the cup which Thou didst drink in order to accomplish my salvation. Here is that which exacts a return of love from me. This, I say, it is, which woos our love and kindles our devotion, and even commands it out of justice, and binds us to it and greatly moves us. Much, indeed, did the Saviour labour to redeem us, but in creating the whole world, the Creator suffered no fatigue. He spake and they were made; He commanded and they were created. But in redeeming, He bore contradiction as to His words; treachery, in actions; derision, in sufferings; reproach, in death."[2] "In the exceeding greatness of His love, Christ gave up His Soul to death, and from His own Side, He paid the price of Satis-

[1] Serm. xi. in Cant.

[2] Serm. xx. in Cant.

faction, to reconcile man to the Father. In which there is an allusion to the words of the Psalmist, 'With the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption.'[1] Yes, indeed, 'plenteous,' for it was not a drop, but streams of blood which issued from the five Sacred Wounds of Christ's Body. What could He have done for us that He did not do! He gave sight to the blind, He set the prisoner free, He brought back the wanderer, He reconciled the guilty. Who would not run after Him, willingly and gladly—Him who frees from error, effaces faults, who in life obtains merits, and in death acquires a recompense? What excuse can he have, who does not run in the odour of His ointments, unless he has lost his sense of smell? But the odour of His life fills all the earth. For 'the earth is full of the mercy of the Lord,' and 'His mercies are over all His works.' He, then, who does not perceive this vital fragrance, which is spread everywhere, must be either dead or in a state of decay." Again, "The Spouse is not ashamed to be black, because she knows that this colour was once that of the Bridegroom, and it is a glory for her to resemble Him. Nothing is more glorious than to bear the reproach of Christ. Hence that word of exultation and salvation, 'God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.'[2] The ignominy of the Cross is grateful to him who is not offended at the Crucified. This blackness, then, is but the form of and resemblance to the Lord. Go to the sacred pages of Isaiah,[3] and he will tell you what he saw in spirit. What else does he speak of, but 'of the Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, who had no beauty that we should desire Him'? And he adds, 'We did not esteem Him—as if a leper, as one smitten of God and afflicted. He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities, and by His stripes we are

[1] Ps. cxxx. 7. [2] Gal. vi. 14. [3] Is. liii. 5.

healed.'" And again, "In the end, He made Himself 'sin;' do I fear to say 'black'? Behold Him, in mean attire, livid with blows, covered with spittle, pallid with death."[1] Again, "Could He have been more deformed, or have appeared blacker to the spectators, than He was when His two Hands were stretched on the Cross, in the midst of two thieves, a sight to call forth derision from the wicked, but tears from the faithful, when He alone was mocked, Who should have caused terror, and ought to have received homage?"[2] And elsewhere, "The rock is a refuge for the wild goats; and are not the wounds of Jesus a firm and safe hiding-place for the weak? So much the more secure I dwell, as He is the more powerful to save; the world may roar, the body press down, the devil lie in wait—I fall not. For I am founded on a strong rock. I have committed a great sin, my conscience is disturbed, but not overwhelmed, for I will remember the wounds of my Lord. He, forsooth, was wounded for our iniquities. Who, then, so near to death, that He may not be saved by the Death of Christ?" And below, "The nail cries, the wound cries, that truly God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself. The iron passed through His Soul, it was plunged into His Heart, that He might henceforth be able to compassionate our infirmities. The secret recesses of His Heart were laid bare through the wounds of His Flesh, that great mystery of love was laid bare, that mercy of our God whereby the Dayspring from on high hath visited us. How were those inner yearnings of the Heart of God disclosed, if not by these wounds? In what, more clearly could the love of God have been manifested than in Thy Wounds; for Thou, O Lord, art good, and gracious, and full of loving-kindness? For no one hath greater mercy than this, that he should lay down his life for those who are condemned and given over to death."[3]

[1] Serm. xxv. in Cant. [2] Serm. xxviii. in Cant. [3] Serm. lxi. in Cant.

And, in another place, S. Bernard says, "Meditate on the Passion of the crucified Body, and see if there is any member in it which does not plead for thee to the Father. For thee, that Divine Head was encircled with the prickly tresses of thorns, which were driven into the tender covering of the brain, and so fixed. 'My people,' says the Lord by His Prophet, 'have surrounded Me with the thorns of their sins.' It is, therefore, that your head may not ache, or your intentions be wounded, that His Eyes were dim with death, and for a while were darkened, whose brightness illuminates the world. Was it not when they were darkened that darkness covered all the earth, and, with those two great luminaries, other lights were withdrawn? But all this was done, that your eyes might be turned away, lest they behold vanity; or, if they did, might shun it. Those Ears which hear in Heaven, 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts,' hear on earth,' 'Thou hast a devil;' 'Crucify Him, crucify Him.' And why this? But that your ears might not be deaf to the cry of the poor, nor be open to words of vanity, or drink in the venom of slander. That beautiful Face, fairer than the sons of men, was besmeared with spittle, injured by blows, regarded with derision. For thus it is written, 'Then did they spit in His Face, and buffeted Him, . . . saying, Prophesy unto us, who is he that smote Thee?'[1] Why was this? But that thy face might be enlightened, and, being enlightened, may be confirmed, and 'be no more sad.'[2] That Mouth, which teaches angels and instructed men, which spake and it was done, was now tormented with vinegar and gall; but this came to pass, that thy lips might speak the words of truth and justice, and confess the Lord thy God. Those Hands, which laid the foundations of the Heavens, are stretched upon the Cross, and transfixed with the sharpest nails, that thine hands

[1] Matt. xxvi. 67, 68. [2] 1 Sam. i. 18.

may be stretched out towards the poor, that you may be able to say with the Psalmist, 'My soul is alway in my hand.'[1] What we have ever in our hand we do not easily forget; so he who applies his soul to good works, will not easily forget it. That Breast, in which are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, was wounded by the soldier's spear, so that thy breast might be purified from all evil imaginings; and having been purified, might be sanctified, and having been sanctified, might be kept holy. Those Feet, whose footstool we ought to adore, because it is holy, were pierced by the cruel nails and fixed, that thy feet might not hasten towards evil, but run in the way of Thy commandments. What shall I say more? 'They pierced My hands and My feet; I may tell all My bones.'[2] For thee He laid down His flesh and life, to gain for Himself thy body and spirit. He gave all for all." Again, "Awake now, O my soul, and shake off your dust, and contemplate this wonderful Man, whom, in 'the mirror of the Gospel,'[3] you may behold as present. Consider, my soul, who is this, who advances with the mien of a king, and nevertheless is covered with confusion as though the vilest slave. He walks crowned, but His crown brings Him torture. At a thousand points His Blessed Head is wounded. He is arrayed in royal purple, yet this contributes rather to contempt than to honour. He bears a sceptre in His Hand; but with it they strike His venerable Head. They worship before Him, bending their knees to the ground, and proclaim Him king; but immediately they spit upon His lovely cheeks, strike Him on the mouth, and dishonour His noble neck.

"Behold, my soul, how that Man by all is pressed and insulted. He is ordered to carry the weight of His Cross, to bear His ignominy to the place of execution. They

[1] Ps. cxix. 109. [2] Ps. xxii. 16, 17.

[3] What follows in this chapter is mostly from S. Anselm.

give Him myrrh and gall to drink. On the Cross He is raised, and He cries, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' Who is this, who does not give vent to one word of complaint, of threatening, or malediction against those accursed 'dogs,' amidst all His sufferings, but His last word was one of blessing on those unjust men, such as had never been before heard? Whom hast thou ever seen, my soul, so meek, so loving? But draw closer to Him, who is worthy to be regarded with the greatest admiration and compassion. Behold Him, stript of His raiment, torn with stripes, bound ignominiously to the Cross by the iron nails, in the midst of two thieves, given gall and vinegar to drink, pierced, when dead, in the side by the spear, with rivers of blood flowing forth from His five wounds, His Hands, His Feet, His Side. O, my eyes, begin to weep, my soul to melt with compassion at the wounding of this most lovely of the sons of men, whom you behold amid such meekness, oppressed by so many sufferings." Again, "Look down, O Lord, Holy Father, from Thy sanctuary, from Thy dwelling on high in the heavens, and behold this sacred offering, which our great High Priest offers to Thee, Thy Holy Child, the Lord Jesus, for the sins of His brethren, and pardon the multitude of our offences. Behold the Blood of our Brother, Jesus, cries unto Thee from the Cross—Behold, I am crowned with glory and honour. At the Right Hand of Thy Majesty He stands for us before Thy Face; for He is our Flesh and our brother." Again, "Look, O Lord, upon the Face of Thine Anointed, who is obedient to Thee, even unto death; let not those wounds depart from Thine eyes for ever, that You may remember what a satisfaction He has paid for our sins. Would that our sins, whereby we have deserved Thy wrath, were placed in one scale of the balance, and all that Thine Innocent Son endured for us in the other. Certainly that Passion would be the greater,

and thus the more worthy of exciting Thy mercy towards us, than our sins of calling forth Thy wrath. O that every tongue might thank Thee, O Lord and Father, for the abundance of Thy goodness, who spared not Thine only begotten Son, but delivered Him up to death for us, to the end that we might have so faithful an Advocate in the heavens before Thee." Again, "And to Thee, O Lord Jesus, most brave Champion, what thanksgiving can I render which shall be worthy of Thee—I, a man, dust and ashes, and vile clay? For what for my salvation wouldst Thou have done, more than Thou hast done? From the sole of Thy foot, even to the top of Thy head, Thou hast been plunged in an abyss of suffering, that Thou mayest extricate me from all suffering. And the waters entered even into Thy Soul. For Thou didst give Thy Soul over unto death, that Thou mightest restore mine, already dead. Lo, Thou hast bound me to Thyself by a twofold debt, by what Thou hast given me originally, and by that which Thou, by suffering, hast restored to me. I am debtor to Thee, for my life, twice given to me: once, at Creation, again in Redemption. What, then, can be more fully Thy due than my life? But for Thy precious Life, Thy Soul so troubled, what can I repay Thee! For if I could offer Thee heaven and earth, and all their garnishment, it would all fall infinitely short of what Thou hast given me. Thy gift must precede all return on my part, for I am myself Thy gift: it is, therefore, only through Thy gracious condescension that I can offer Thee any return whatever. I ought to love Thee with all my heart, all my mind, all my soul, all my strength; and to follow Thy footsteps, who didst deign to die for me; but how can I do this, except through Thee? My soul shall cleave unto Thee, for all my strength depends on Thee?" Thus also S. Bernard. And you have, indeed, in S. Bernard, mellifluous and most lovely outpourings on

the Passion of our Lord. See that you imbibe them. And, with the aid of these passages, go over with all your heart's devotion the account of our Lord's Passion, because meditation thereon surpasses all other, for the Passion is the most efficacious part of His Life. Now, let us turn to the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

Of the Lord's Resurrection. How He first appeared on Sunday, it may be, to His Mother.[1]

THE Lord Jesus, very early in the morning, came with a glorious multitude of angels to the tomb on the Lord's day, and re-assumed His most holy Body; and having risen again, went forth by His own power, the tomb being still closed. But at the same hour—very early in the morning—Mary Magdalene and the mother of James, and Salome, began to go to the sepulchre with the ointments, taking leave of the Blessed Mother.

But the Blessed Mother remained at home, and prayed; we may imagine her words: "O most merciful Father, O most loving Father, as Thou knowest, my Son has died; He has been fastened to the Cross between two robbers. I have buried Him with my own hands; but Thou art powerful, O Lord, and canst restore Him to me safe and sound. I beseech Thy Majesty to restore Him. Why delays He so long to come to me? Send Him back to me, I pray Thee, for my soul cannot rest until I see Him. O my sweetest Son! what has come to Thee? What art

[1] Vide Introd. p. xvii.

Thou doing? Why art Thou delaying? I pray Thee, do not put off any longer to come to me; for Thou saidst, 'On the third day, I will rise again.' Is it not now the third day, my Son; for not yesterday, but the day before, was that great and bitter day, a day of affliction and death, of darkness and blackness, of parting and of dying. This, then, my Son, is the third day. Awake up, my Glory, my Only Good, and return. Above all things, I desire to see Thee. Let Thy return console me as Thy departure deeply grieved me. Return, then, my Beloved; come, Lord Jesus; come, my only Hope; come to me, my Son." Whilst she thus prayed and gently wept, represent to your mind the Lord Jesus suddenly appearing, with garments of the whitest hue, with calm countenance, beautiful, glorious, radiant with joy, and accosting His holy parent. And she, recognizing her Son, fell upon her knees, adoring Him. And then her Son replied, "I am Jesus, Thy Son; I have risen from the dead." Then rising, and weeping for joy, she embraced Him, and pressing her face upon His, she clung to Him, whilst He lovingly held her. And as they remained a while together, the Blessed Mother closely regarded Him, looking over Him to find any traces of His sufferings; she saw His Face the same as before, but she marked the wounds in His Hands. Whereupon He may have replied to her inquiring look, "All sorrow has now left me; I have overcome death and grief, all pain and anguish, nor shall I ever feel any more." Then the Blessed Virgin would give thanks: "Blessed be Thy Father, Who hath restored Thee; exalted and praised be His Name, and be it magnified for ever." They then remain and rejoice together; with love and joy the first Easter is thus kept. And the Lord Jesus recounted, how He had delivered His people from Hell, and all things which He had done those three days. O what a great Easter was this!

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

How Magdalen and the Other Two Maries came to the Sepulchre, and of the Running of Peter and John.

But Magdalen and the other two Maries went, as I have said, to the sepulchre, with the ointments. When, then, they had gone beyond the gate of the city, they recalled to memory the trials and sufferings of their Master, and at all the places where anything of importance had happened they stopped, we may imagine, a little, kneeling down and kissing the ground, and giving vent to groans and sighs, saying, "Here we met Him with the Cross on His shoulder, when His mother almost died with trouble. Here He turned Himself to the women. Here He laid down His Cross through weariness; on that stone He rested a while. Here so cruelly and harshly they goaded Him on, and made Him go quickly, almost run. Here they stripped Him of His raiment. Here they crucified Him!" And then, with great crying and floods of tears, they cast themselves down upon their faces, and salute the Cross; still red with the Precious Blood. Then rising, and going towards the Sepulchre, they said,[1] "Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?" And on looking up, they saw the stone rolled away, and the Angel of the Lord sitting upon it, who said to them, "Fear not," etc., as in the Gospel is recorded. But they, disappointed of their hope—for they thought to find the Lord's Body—not at-

[1] S. Mark xvi. 3.

tending to the words of the Angel, returned terrified to the disciples, saying that the Lord's Body had been taken away. Then Peter and John ran to the sepulchre.

Observe carefully all that happened. These Apostles run; Magdalen and her companions run after them; all run to seek their Lord, who was their heart and their soul; they run with much trust, much fervour, much anxiety. But when they had come to the tomb and looked into it, they found not the Body, but they saw the linen clothes and napkin, and departed. Compassionate them, for they are in great affliction. They seek their Lord, and find Him not; and they know not where further to look for Him; therefore, sorrowing and weeping, they went away.

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

How the Lord appeared to the Three Maries.

But the Maries remained in the same place, and looking into the sepulchre, they saw two angels, standing in white garments, who said to them, "Whom seek ye; the Living among the dead?"[1] But they neither heeded their words, nor accepted any consolation from the angelic vision, for they sought not angels, but the Lord of angels. Two of the Maries were again frightened, and as it were absorbed with grief, and drew themselves back a little, and sat sorrowing. But Magdalen, not knowing what else could be done, and because she could not live without her Master, when she could not find Him there, and knew not where to look for Him, stood at the sepulchre without, weeping.

[1] S. Luke xxiv. 5.

Again she looked into the sepulchre, because she was constantly hoping that she should see Him there where she had buried Him, and she saw the same angels sitting there, who said to her, "Woman, why weepest Thou? Whom seekest Thou?" And she replied, "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him." See the wonderful action of love. A little while before she had heard from one angel that He had risen, and afterwards from the two that He was alive, and yet she seemed to forget their words, and answer, "I know not." Love effected this, because, as Origen says, "her soul was not where she herself was, but where her Master was. She knew only to think, to speak, to hear, of Him." But while she thus wept, she cared not for angels; but from love of her, her Master was unable any longer to keep away. Perhaps Jesus informs His mother of His desire to comfort Magdalen, in which she rejoices. "Go, my Son, and console her; she hath loved us tenderly, and was in bitter grief at your death." And Jesus, full of love for her, departed. He comes to the sepulchre in the garden, where Magdalen was, and says to her, "Woman, whom seekest thou? Why weepest Thou?"[1] And she, not yet recognizing Him, as one who did not know what she was doing, answers Him, "Sir, if Thou have borne Him hence, tell me where Thou hast laid Him; and I will take Him away." Regard her attentively; how, with tearful countenance, and in a suppliant and devout manner, she prays Him to tell her where He is whom she seeks. For she was continually hoping to get some tidings of her Beloved. Then the Lord said to her, "Mary;" and she, coming to herself and recognizing Him by His voice, said with inexpressible joy, "Rabbi," that is, Master, "Thou art the Lord whom I sought; why hast Thou so long concealed Thyself from me?" And

[1] S. John xx. 15.

running to His Feet, she longed to embrace them. But the Lord, desirous of raising her mind to heavenly things, that she might not henceforth seek Him on earth, said, "Touch Me not, for I am not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren, and say unto them, that I ascend unto My Father, and your Father," etc. And He added, "Did not I tell you beforehand, that on the third day I should rise again; why, then, did you seek me in the Sepulchre?" And she replied, "O Master, I tell you that such grief had possessed my heart for the bitterness of Thy Death and Passion, that, mindful of nought else, I remembered nothing but Thy dead Body, and the place where It was laid; and therefore this morning I brought the ointment. Blessed be Thy Majesty, who had deigned to rise again and come back to us!" Then they rejoiced together with great gladness of heart. But she closely regarded Him, and asked Him many questions, to which He replied with readiness. Is not this a great Easter?

But notwithstanding our Lord's check, I can hardly believe but that she lovingly touched Him before she left Him, and kissed His Feet and Hands. But the Lord at first gave her that warning, for the instruction of others also, because He revealed Himself to her as He had been in her affections, or because He willed to raise her thoughts to heavenly things, as S. Bernard seems to suggest. For it will surely be piously believed, that as He so lovingly and singularly revealed Himself to her, before all others, according to the record of Holy Scripture, He did this, not to confound her, but to fill her with joy. For a mysterious purpose, then, and not harshly, did He say that word; because the most gracious Lord is neither inexorable nor severe, and least of all to those who love Him. After, then, a little delay, the Lord departed from her, saying that He must visit others also.

Then Magdalen, altogether changed, resigned herself to the thought of His departure, saying, "I see, O Lord, that Thou wilt not again be with us, as Thou hast formerly been; I beseech Thee, do not forget me; remember all the blessings, O Lord, which Thou hast bestowed upon me; remember Thy friendship and Thy love for me; remember me, O Lord my God." And the Lord replied to her, "Fear not; be strong and steadfast, for I shall be always with you." Then Christ gives her His blessing and departs; and she joins her companions, and relates all that had passed; and they, filled with joy at the Resurrection, but grieving that they had not themselves seen Him, depart with her. Whilst the three Maries thus walked together, before they reached the city, the Lord Jesus appeared to them, saying, "All hail."[1] And they, rejoicing beyond all description, fell down before Him, and embraced His Feet. Then they likewise look inquiringly, and gaze upon Him, and rejoice in His gracious response to them, and they too keep a great Easter. But the Lord Jesus says to them, "Tell my brethren that they go into Galilee; and there shall they see Me,"[2] as I foretold them. You see that the Master of humility calls His disciples brethren; has He, then, ceased to exercise this virtue? But you, for your part, if you would gain the knowledge and consolation which this scene should impart to you, do what I have before taught you: be present in spirit at every spot, as though you were there bodily. And in this manner strive to realize all that follows.

[1] S. Matt. xxviii. 9. [2] Ibid. 10.

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

Our Lord is said to have appeared to Joseph, as well as to James the Less, and Peter.[1]

THEN the Lord Jesus, departing from them, is said to have appeared to Joseph, who had buried Him, visiting him in prison, where the Jews had confined him, intending to put him to death after the Sabbath. The Lord appeared to him, to comfort him and wipe the tears of sorrow from his face, and gave him, according to tradition, liberty. Then the Lord Jesus manifested Himself to James the Less, who, it is said, had vowed that he would not eat until he had seen Him risen, according to S. Jerome. And the Lord said to him and to those who were with him, "Set on meat;" and having blessed the food, He gave it to him, saying, "Eat, beloved brother, for the Son of man is risen from the dead."

But when Magdalen and her companions return to the house, and tell His disciples that the Lord has risen, Peter, grieving that he had not seen his Lord, nor able to rest for the vehemence of his love, departed from them, and went alone towards the Sepulchre; for He knew not where else to go in quest of Him. Whilst He was on the road, the Lord Jesus appeared to him, saying, "Peace be to thee, Simon." Then Peter, smiting his breast, and falling to the ground, cried out with tears, "O Lord, I acknowledge my fault, that I forsook Thee, and many times denied Thee;" and he kissed His Feet. Then our Lord raised him from the ground, and embraced him, saying, "Peace be unto

[1] 1 Cor. xv. 5–7. S. Luke xxiv. 34.

thee; fear not, all thy sins are forgiven thee; I knew well what would happen, and forewarned thee. Now, therefore, go and strengthen thy brethren, and be strong, for I have conquered death, and all your enemies and adversaries." Then he kept his great Easter. And they remain and hold converse together, and Peter diligently regarded Him, and marked every particular. The Lord then gave him His benediction, and he returned to the other disciples, and related all that had happened. Now, you must know that the appearance of our Lord to the Blessed Virgin is not recorded in Holy Scripture. I mentioned it at first, because the Church seems to hold it, and it appears at length in the legend on the Resurrection.

CHAPTER XC.

Of the Return of our Lord to the Holy Fathers after the Resurrection.

The Lord Jesus, when He had left Peter, having not yet visited the Holy Fathers, whom He had translated into the Paradise of delights, returned to them, clothed in a white robe, and accompanied by a multitude of angels. And when they saw Him coming to them in so great glory, they received Him with indescribable joy and exultation, with songs and canticles of praise, saying, "Behold our King; come, let us run to meet our Saviour; great is the beginning of His kingdom, and it shall know no end; a holy Day hath dawned upon us, come all and adore the Lord." And falling to the ground, they worshipped Him; then, rising and standing by Him, they reverently and sweetly concluded their praises, saying, "'The Lion of the tribe of Judah hath

prevailed.'[1] My flesh, O Lord, shall rest in hope, Thou shalt fill me with joy from Thy Countenance; at Thy Right Hand there is pleasure for evermore. Thou art risen, O our glory; we will be glad and rejoice in Thee. Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Thy dominion endureth from generation to generation. And we do not depart from Thee; Thou wilt raise us up, and we shall exalt Thy Name. The Forerunner is for us entered, 'made an High Priest for ever.'[2] 'This is the Day which the Lord hath made, we will be glad and rejoice in it.'[3] This day the Day of Redemption hath dawned on us, of Reparation for the long past, of eternal joy in the future. On this day, the very heavens drop honey throughout the world, for 'the Lord hath reigned from the Tree.' The Lord hath reigned, and hath put on glorious apparel; the Lord hath put on His apparel, and girded Himself with strength.[4] 'Sing unto the Lord a new song, for He hath done marvellous things; with His own right hand and with His holy arm hath He gotten Himself the victory.'[5] But we His people, and the sheep of His pasture, come let us adore Him."

When the evening drew on, the Lord Jesus said to them, "I have compassion on My brethren, for they are grieved and dismayed at My death, and are scattered as sheep without a shepherd, and they desire much to see Me. I will go, then, and show Myself to them: I will strengthen and console them, and will soon return again to you." Then falling down before Him, they said, "Be it, O Lord, as Thou hast said."

[1] Rev. v. 5. [2] Heb. vi. 20. [3] Ps. cxviii. 27.
[4] Ps. xciii. 1. [5] Ps. xcviii. 1.

CHAPTER XCI.

How the Lord appeared to Two Disciples on the Road to Emmaus.

When two of the disciples were going towards a village called Emmaus, despairing and sad, as they conversed upon all that had happened, the Lord Jesus drew near, and as a stranger joined Himself to them, and journeyed with them, entering into conversation, asking them questions and replying to their inquiries, and giving them wholesome instructions, as is recorded in the Gospel. At length, constrained by them, He went in with them and manifested Himself to them. Give heed to all that happened, and consider the goodness and kindness of our Lord. First, in that His ardent love was unable to endure that they should thus wander and be sad. Truly as a faithful friend, a constant companion, the benign Lord joins Himself to them, seeks the cause of their sadness, and expounds to them the Scriptures, inflaming their hearts and cleansing them from all the rust of their corrupt nature.

And this He fain would do daily with us. When we are weighed down with trouble or overcome with weariness, if we speak of Him, He will comfort and illuminate our hearts, and inflame them with His love; for the best remedy for such disorders is to turn at once to God. Wherefore the Prophet says, "O how sweet are Thy words unto my throat; yea, sweeter than honey unto my mouth."[1] And again, "Thy word is tried to the uttermost, and Thy servant loveth it."[2] And thus, of meditating upon God, the

[1] Ps. cxix. 103. [2] Ps. cxix. 140.

same Prophet says, "My heart was hot within me; and while I was thus musing, the fire kindled." [1]

Secondly, consider the goodness of our Lord, not only expressed in love, but in deep humility. Behold Him, with what lowliness He walks with them; He, the Lord of all, walks with them, as if only one of them. Do you not see He still adheres to the principles of lowliness? He has left us an example, that we may imitate Him. He did not disdain those disciples who were of a lower degree, but joins them, and enters into familiar converse with them. The world would act very differently; they would choose out the chief and the rich, and would only make companions of such. In another way, too, His humility is manifest. For the proud do not like to expend grand sayings amongst a few; but our Lord with two reveals His sacred things: He despises not a few, no, not even one, for He once talked with the woman of Samaria.

Thirdly, consider the goodness of our Lord, how on this occasion He instructed His disciples in moral truth, how He refreshes and comforts them. You may depict Him to yourself how He made as though He would go further, that He might draw out their desire, and that they might invite and detain Him in their company; and how, afterwards, He graciously entered in with them, took bread, blessed it with His most holy Hands, brake it, and gave it to them, and revealed Himself to them. Daily would He do the same spiritually with us, for He wills to be held and invited by means of our desires, prayers, and holy meditations. And therefore we ought always to pray, and not to faint, as He Himself hath taught us. All this was done for our instruction, that we should apply ourselves to works of kindness and hospitality, and learn how Divine lessons have not only to be heard and read, but to be fulfilled in

[1] Ps. xxxix. 4.

act. Concerning this, you will find ample matter in the homily of Gregory upon the Gospel. Christ, however, only remained for a brief interval with those disciples, but immediately, when He had given them bread, vanished out of their sight. For He willed to console others, by the same means by which He had comforted them.

CHAPTER XCII.

How the Lord appeared to the Disciples, whilst shut up on the Day of the Resurrection.

But the two disciples returned immediately to Jerusalem, and found the other disciples, except Thomas, assembled together, and told them what had happened; whilst they in turn heard that the Lord had risen indeed, and had appeared to Simon. Then the Lord Jesus, coming in to them, the doors being shut, stood in the midst and said unto them, "Peace be unto you."[1] And the disciples fell to the ground, and charged themselves with the fault of having forsaken Him; and they received Him gladly and eagerly. Then the Lord says, "Rise, my brethren, for all your sins are forgiven you." Then He stood and talked with them familiarly, and showed them His Hands and Side, and opened their understanding, that they may understand the Scriptures and know His Resurrection. He seeks from them, whether they have anything to eat; and He eats before them a piece of a broiled fish, and of a honeycomb. He breathes upon them, and says to them, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost."[2] See you, how they are filled with sweetness and joy. Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord. They

[1] S. Luke xxiv. 36. [2] S. John xx. 22.

rejoice before Him, who at first were terrified. O how readily did they give Him what He asked; how eagerly they served Him; how delighted were they to be near Him! How would our Lord's mother rejoice at this, and they with her; how would she be delighted, if she could be near her Son, and minister to Him; and He, too, we may imagine, would delight in such attendance. And then, Magdalen too, for we must not forget her, a beloved disciple, a sort of Apostle of Apostles. You may depict her, sitting again at Jesus' Feet, and listening gladly to His words, her heart full of joy and willingness to serve Him. O what a holy company, and how delightful to dwell therein! If you have any devotion, does this not seem to you a great Easter? Yes, indeed, it is. But the Lord remained but a little time with them, for it was somewhat late. Haply they pressed Him to stay a little longer with them, besecching Him not to depart so quickly. Magdalen fain would hold His robe, and with reverent boldness detain Him a little longer; holding that robe of light and brightness with which He seemed enveloped, with a holy confidence and love, yet without presumption. And Jesus delighted in this desire to detain Him, for He sought, as we have seen at Emmaus, to draw it out. Then the Lord, bidding all adieu, and blessing them, withdrew. And they, prostrating themselves before Him, besought Him soon to return to them. But they remained hungering and thirsting for their Lord, whose presence was wont to be so abundantly granted to them, calling Him back to them with sighs and longings. You see how often to-day you have kept Easter; for all these appearances were on Easter Day. But, perhaps, you have heard all this without realizing it, because you did not enter with sympathy into the mystery of the Passion. For I believe that if you had sympathized with His Passion, and kept your mind fixed and collected with regard to it,

not scattered upon worldly, superfluous, and curious objects, you would in all these instances taste the joy of Easter. And this may take place in a measure on every Sunday, if on the Friday and Saturday you prepare yourself by meditating with all your powers on the Passion; for the Apostle especially says, "As ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation."[1]

CHAPTER XCIII.

How the Lord appeared to His Disciples on the Octave of Easter, and Thomas was then with them.

AGAIN, on the eighth day of the Resurrection, the Lord Jesus appeared to His disciples, the doors being shut. And Thomas was with them, who was not there on the former occasion, and he—when they told him that they had seen the Lord—replied, "Unless I see in His Hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails," etc., as recorded in the Gospel, "I will not believe."[2] Then the Good Shepherd, watchful over His little flock, says to them, "Peace be unto you." Then saith He to Thomas, "Reach hither thy finger and behold My Hands, and reach hither thy hand and thrust it into My Side, and be not faithless, but believing." Then Thomas fell down before Him, and touched the wounds of His Lord, and said, "My Lord and my God!" For he saw the manhood, and believed in the Godhead. Then he, too, confessed, as the others had done, his fault in having forsaken Him. But the Lord, raising him up, said, "Fear not; all sins are forgiven thee." This

[1] 1 Cor. i. 7. [2] S. John xx. 25.

doubting of Thomas was permitted for the benefit of others, that they might thereby have more evident proofs of the truth of the Resurrection. Behold our Lord, then, attentively, and observe His accustomed kindness, lowliness, and fervent love; how He shows His wounds to Thomas and the other disciples, that He may altogether remove the cloud of uncertainty from their hearts, both for their benefit and for ours. Moreover, our Lord preserved the marks of His wounds chiefly for these three reasons: that He might cause His Apostles to believe in His Resurrection; that He might show them to the Father, when He wills to appease Divine Wrath and intercede for us as our Advocate; that He might show them to the reprobate on the Day of Judgment.[1] The Lord Jesus, then, remains a while with His mother and His disciples, speaking of the things of the Kingdom of God, and they are filled with joy, hearing His sublime teaching, and beholding His countenance, radiant with joy and beauty. Attend well to every detail of this scene; behold Him, His disciples, His mother, Magdalen, etc. Stand yourself reverently and afar off; unless, perhaps, moved with pity, He should seem to call you nearer to Him. At length, He proposes that they go into Galilee, to Mount Tabor, as it is said, and that there they shall see Him. And, having blessed them, He departed from them. But they remained as before, full of hunger and thirst for His Presence, yet very much comforted.

[1] Rev. i. 7.

CHAPTER XCIV.

How the Lord appeared to His Disciples in Galilee.

After these things, as the disciples were journeying to the appointed place, again the Lord Jesus appeared to them, saying, "All power is given unto Me in Heaven and in earth: go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you."[1] And be of good courage, for "I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." When He appeared to them, they adored Him; and remained with Him with great delight. Behold them attentively, and consider all that passes between them, for the words are wonderful. He shows them how He is Lord of all; He gives them the command to preach: He gave them the *form* of Baptism; He instilled strength into them, by saying He would be with them always. You see how great sweetness He imparts to them, and how many remarkable proofs of love He shows them. When our Lord had finished these things, He gave them His blessing, and disappeared from their sight.

[1] S. Matt. xxviii. 18–20.

CHAPTER XCV.

How the Lord appeared to His Disciples at the Sea of Tiberias.

But the disciples still remained in Galilee. And on a certain occasion they went a-fishing on the sea of Tiberias, seven of them, and through the whole night caught nothing. But when it was morning, the Lord again appeared to them, standing on the sea-shore. Now observe what took place, for it is a scene full of beauty. Whereupon, the Lord inquired, if they had taken anything, and they answered, No. Then said He, "Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find."[1] They did so, therefore, and enclosed a great multitude of fishes. Then said John to Peter, "It is the Lord." Then Peter, being naked, girt himself with his coat, and hastily cast himself into the sea to come to Him, but the others drew the boat to shore. And when they had landed, they saw a fish laid upon hot coals, and bread made ready for them, for the Lord had prepared it. Then He made them eat of the fish which had been taken and roasted, and, eating with them, He celebrated a joyful festival and banquet with them on the shore; and with His accustomed humility served them, handing them bread and breaking it, and doing the same with the fish. And they stood reverently by Him—these seven disciples—with great joy in the companionship of their Lord, eating with Him, beholding His beautiful and joyous countenance, and exulting in their hearts; they receive from His most sacred Hands this agreeable food, and are refreshed not less spiritually than bodily. O what a feast is this! Regard

[1] S. John xxi. 6.

well every circumstance, and, as far as may be, be nourished with them. Attend, however, to what follows, for it is full of beauty and interest. For when this solemn feast was ended, the Lord says to Peter, "Lovest thou Me more than these?"[1] And Peter answers, "Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee;" whereupon the Lord says to Him, "Feed my lambs," etc. Thus, thrice questioning him, He committed to him His flock. In which act, consider the wonted kindness, charity, and humility of the Lord. You see clearly how diligently and affectionately He impresses upon and reiterates to Peter this charge, committing souls to his care.

After this, the Lord foretold to Peter His death, saying, "When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself," etc.; signifying that by the suffering of the cross He should glorify God. And when Peter inquired about John, "What shall this man do?"[2] the Lord replied, "If I will that he tarry till I come,"—that is, "I will that he shall not follow Me by the way of suffering, but that he shall rest in an old age and in contemplation." But the other disciples gathered from this that he should not die; but such would be no great favour, since it is better to depart and be with Christ. You have seen how many, and how great things were done and said at this appearance. After this the Lord disappeared from their sight, and in the usual way returned, no doubt, to the Holy Fathers. But the disciples remained with great joy, and afterwards returned to Jerusalem, etc.

[1] S. John xxi. 15. [2] Ibid. 21, 22

CHAPTER XCVI.

How the Lord appeared to more than Five Hundred Brethren at once, and on the Appearances Generally.

But again the Lord appeared to more than five hundred[1] brethren at once, as the Apostle says; but where and when this Appearance took place, we are not told. But the gracious Lord, standing in the midst of them, preaching and speaking concerning the kingdom of God, filled them with great sweetness. You have thus twelve Appearances of our Lord from the Resurrection to the Ascension, besides the two to be treated in connection with the Ascension itself, making in all fourteen. You must remember, however, that two are only legendary. The Appearance to His mother is a matter of pious belief, not of scriptural authority. And the account of the Appearance to Joseph is only found in the so-called Gospel of Nicodemus. How the Lord appeared to James, the Apostle relates in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, and S. Jerome records it; and this Appearance to the five hundred is written in the same place. All the other Appearances are in the Gospel. There is more yet, upon which you may piously meditate. For it is very probable that there are unrecorded Appearances, and that our Lord often visited His mother, disciples, and Magdalen, His beloved disciple, comforting and gladdening those who had been so grieved and terrified by His Passion. The same was thought by S. Augustine, who says of the time after the Resurrection, "Everything which happened is not recorded, His intercourse with them was frequent." We can imagine, too, how the Holy Fathers rejoiced in the Incarnation; how

[1] 1 Cor. xv. 6.

especially Abraham and David delighted to see their promises fulfilled; how Jesus was born of a blessed mother, through whom grace and salvation entered into the world. O what was their joy and delight, when they were witnesses of these things! Here again, as before, you can consider the kindness, love, and lowliness of the Lord (which virtues we have often pointed out, for they are ever observable in His conduct), in that, after He had conquered gloriously, and risen again, He yet vouchsafed to stay here forty days,[1] prolonging His pilgrimage, in order that He might confirm and strengthen His disciples. For justly, after a career of so many years, after so many labours and afflictions, after such an ignominious and bitter death, the Conqueror might have returned at once in triumph to His Glory, and have despatched angels to comfort and strengthen His Apostles at His will. But His love would not permit this course: He willed personally to converse with them, appearing to them for forty days by many proofs, and speaking to them of the Kingdom of God. He did this for them, and for us too; but we pay but little heed to it. He loved thee vehemently, and is not loved in return; whereas, from such and so great a fire, we ought not only to be warmed, but to be inflamed. Now let us come to the Ascension.

CHAPTER XCVII.

The Ascension of our Lord.

Concerning the Ascension of our Lord it behoves you to re-kindle your devotion, and if you have already striven to be present in spirit, hearing His words and seeing His

[1] Acts i. 3.

actions, you must now more than ever gather up the powers of your soul in meditating upon this event.

Now, this Mystery surpasses all the rest, as I shall clearly show you. Let this at least stimulate you to give your attention, that now our Lord is about to withdraw His bodily presence, having completed the days of His pilgrimage. Wherefore His words and actions should be very attentively considered. For every faithful soul ought to regard with watchful eyes her Spouse, her Lord and God, when He is about to leave her, contemplating His every word and act with the utmost attention, and with all the affection of her heart; and with increased devotion and lowliness to commend herself to Him, totally withdrawing her thoughts from all other subjects.

Thus, on the fortieth day after the Resurrection, the Lord Jesus, knowing that His hour was come, that He should depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own, He loved them to the end.[1] Therefore, taking with Him from the earthly Paradise the Holy Fathers and other souls, and giving His blessing to Elias and Enoch, who remained there, and still lived on, He came to His disciples who were in the upper room at Mount Zion, with His mother and others; and appearing to them, He manifested a desire before His departure to sit at meat with them, in token of His loving remembrance of them and joy in their company. Whilst all were eating and rejoicing in this last feast with their Lord, the Lord Jesus says to them, "It is time that I return to Him who sent Me; but you remain in this city until ye be endued with power from on high,[2] for within a few days ye shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, as I have promised you. Afterwards ye shall go through all the world, preaching My Gospel, baptizing those who believe, and ye shall be witnesses to Me even to the ends

[1] S. John xiii. 1. [2] S. Luke xxiv. 49.

of the earth." Also He upbraided them for their unbelief,[1] because they believed not those who had seen Him risen, namely, His angels. This He does with an express purpose, when He was speaking to them of preaching, as though He would have them understand Him to say—"Much more ought you to have believed Angels, even before you saw Me; than the Gentiles to believe your preaching, which they will do without seeing Me." In doing this, He had the further purpose of making them more humble through the consciousness of their fault; thus giving them, at His departure, a last instance of His love of humility, and in what an especial manner He willed that it should be cultivated. But when they asked Him about the future, He would not answer them, because it was not expedient for them to know it. Thus they remained together, eating, speaking, rejoicing before the presence of their Lord, but yet ill at ease through the thought of His departure. For they loved Him with such a tender love, that they could not even bear the mention of His leaving them without being overcome by it.

But what shall I say of His mother, who was haply near Him at this meal, and of course loved Him in a way none other could? Must not these words about going away have touched her very keenly, as we may image her reclining with her head upon her Son's breast, full of maternal affection? For if John did this at the Supper, much more may we conceive that she might have thus reclined now; and that she begged Him, with many sighs and tears, "If Thou must go, take me with Thee." And our Lord comforted her: "I pray thee, most beloved mother, grieve not at my departure, for I go to the Father. You must remain a time, confirming others in what thou knowest of Me, and then afterwards I will come to thee, and receive thee to

[1] S. Mark xvi. 14.

glory." To which she replied, "Thy will be done, most beloved Son. I am ready not only to remain, but to die, if I may benefit those for whom Thou hast died; but remember me." Then the Lord comforted her, the disciples, Magdalen, and the other women, saying, "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. I will not leave you comfortless. I go away, and I will come to you again, I will be with you always."

At length, He says to them that they should go forth to the Mount of Olives, for it was from thence He willed to ascend; and then He disappeared from them. Then His mother and all the rest, without delay, went to the appointed Mount, which is from Jerusalem about a league, and there again the Lord appeared to them. Lo, on this day you have two Appearances. He then, we can imagine, embraced His mother, and bade her adieu, and His mother most tenderly parted from Him. But the disciples, and Magdalen, and the rest, fell down, and gave vent to their grief, kissing His Feet. Then He raised up His Apostles, and embraced them graciously.

Behold them now attentively, and all that happens. Consider, also, the Holy Fathers as present, though invisibly, and with what joy and reverence they regard the Lord's mother, and affectionately bless her, through whose instrumentality they have obtained so great a benefit. Consider, also, how they eye those exalted champions and leaders of the Divine army, whom our Lord chose out of all, to attack and subdue the whole world. At last, when all these mysteries had been accomplished, the Lord Jesus was to be withdrawn from them, and to ascend by His own power. Then His mother and all the others fell to the ground; and she said, "My Son, ever blessed Son, remember me." At His departure she could not refrain from tears, and yet she greatly rejoiced, because she saw her Son ascend thus

gloriously into Heaven. And likewise His disciples said, "O Lord, for Thee we left all things; be mindful of us." But He, with uplifted Hands, and serene and joyous Face, crowned with royalty and beauty, was triumphantly borne into Heaven. Blessing them, He said, "Be steadfast and act manfully, for I will be always with you." Then He ascended, leading with Him a noble multitude, opening a way to them, as Micah the Prophet said.[1] Thus the Lord, glorious, white and ruddy, splendid and radiant with joy, went before them, showing them the way; and they, singing and exulting most joyfully, followed Him, saying, "O sing unto God, and sing praises unto His Name: magnify Him that rideth upon the heavens, as it were upon an horse; praise Him in His Name, Jah, and rejoice before Him.[2] O that men would therefore praise the Lord for His goodness, and declare the wonders that He doeth for the children of men.[3] Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, Thou that art the Saviour of "them which put their trust in Thee,"[4] bringing forth Thy people with joy, and Thy chosen with gladness.[5] "Set up Thyself above the heavens, O God, and Thy glory above the earth,[6] that Thy beloved may be delivered."[7] "Thou art gone up on High," making a prosperous journey for us, bringing us out into a wealthy place.[8] Thou deliveredst the prisoners in Thy strength, giving us our desire. We will enter into Thy house, and in the sight of Thy angels will praise Thee. Glory, praise and honour be to Thee, O Christ, King and Redeemer, Sing unto God, O ye kingdoms of the earth, sing unto the Lord."

In the meanwhile Michael, leader of the Heavenly Court, entering into that Blessed Country, announces that the

[1] Mic. ii. 13. [2] Ps. lxviii. 4. [3] Ps. cvii. 8.
[4] Ps. xvii. 7. [5] Ps. cv. 43. [6] Ps. lvii. 6.
[7] Ps. cviii. 6. [8] Ps. lxvi. 11.

Lord was ascending. Behold, all the orders of spirits, in due gradation, come forth to meet Him; not one remained who did not come to meet the Lord; and bending before Him with all possible reverence, they conducted Him, with hymns and ineffable canticles. Who can describe the songs and strains with which they greeted Him? "Princes went before, joined with singers,[1] and said, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia. O Blessed King, who comest in the Name of the Lord. Now to Thee who reignest, behold, we chant our songs.

"Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, Who sittest upon the cherubim, and beholdest the depths. Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia. Worthy art Thou, O Lord, of all praise and honour, Alleluia, for Thou hast done gloriously, Alleluia. Let the heavens confess Thy wonderful works, O Lord, Alleluia. And Thy Power! Alleluia. Behold now the tribes go up, even the tribes of the Lord,[2] Alleluia. To give thanks unto the Name of the Lord, and to say to Thee, Alleluia. To rejoice in the joy of Thy race, that Thou mayest be praised with Thine inheritance, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia." In songs and praises such as these, they honoured their Lord, exulting before Him, and singing from one side to another, they celebrated with all reverence a glorious Festival. And who shall describe their joy?

Who, too, can picture the delight of all these most blessed spirits and Holy Fathers, when they met together? For the supernal spirits, when they had shown reverence to our Lord, and finished their canticles of joy, addressed the Fathers, we may imagine, with great sweetness: "O princes of the people, we congratulate you that you are come hither, Alleluia. Ye are assembled around your God, Alleluia: and are greatly exalted, Alleluia. Sing to Him who hath ascended above the heaven of heavens, Alleluia, Alleluia." And the Holy Fathers promptly replied, "O ye princes of

[1] Ps. lxviii. 25. V. [2] Ps. cxxii. 4.

the people of the Lord, Alleluia. Our guardians and defenders, Alleluia. Joy to you and peace, Alleluia. Sing ye, also, to our King, Alleluia. Exult in God our Defender, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia." Then, bending towards one another, they said, "We go with gladness into the house of the Lord, Alleluia, Alleluia. The venerable City of God shall receive us together, Alleluia. We are the sheep of the Lord's pasture; let us enter into His gates and into His courts, Alleluia; with hymns and songs, Alleluia. For the Lord of Hosts is with us, Alleluia. He is our Protector, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia." See you, how all rejoice and sing. For, according to the Prophet, God hath gone up with a merry noise, and the Lord with the sound of the trumpet.[1] Our Lord Jesus ascended in their sight, for the consolation of His mother and disciples, that they might see Him as far as they could. And then "a cloud received Him out of their sight,"[2] and presently He was with the blessed spirits and Holy Fathers before mentioned, in His Country. For thus the Prophet's prediction runs, "Who makest the clouds Thy chariot, and walkest upon the wings of the wind."[3] The wings of the wind are the summits of the wind; that is, the parts which precede and are swiftest. He then ascended more quickly, when the cloud received Him out of their sight. Then remained His mother, the disciples, Magdalen, and others, in adoration, and with fixed gaze intently watching Him, as He ascended up into heaven, and passed beyond their sight.

And oh, what a sight it must have been to have seen the Lord thus gloriously ascend! And what to have seen and heard those blessed spirits and holy souls, who ascended with Him! Perhaps such a sight would have been too much for the soul, and have burst its bonds of flesh, and have drawn it to the skies. And while they steadfastly

[1] Ps. xlvii. 5. [2] Acts i. 9. [3] Ps. civ. 3.

looked up, behold, two angels stood by them in white apparel, and said, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into Heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into Heaven."[1] "Return, then, into the city, and wait as He bade you." Consider, then, how the Lord had a care for all. For no sooner had He disappeared from them, than immediately He despatched His angels to them, that they might be comforted by the angels' testimony with them to the truth of the Ascension of their Lord. His mother, if she heard the angelic message, might have humbly besought them to commend her to her Son; and they with reverence and willingness have received such a charge. Similarly, the Apostles, Magdalen, and the others, entreated them. But they disappeared, and then returned to the city, to Mount Zion, and their abode, as the Lord had bidden them.

But the Lord Jesus, with the whole aforesaid august and magnificent throng, having opened the gates of Paradise, which had hitherto been closed against mankind, entered with triumph, and bending before the Father's Throne, said, "I give Thee thanks, O Father, Who hath given Me the victory over all My enemies. Behold our friends, who were held captive, I present to Thee; but to My brethren and disciples, whom I left in the world, I promised to send the Holy Spirit. I pray Thee, therefore, Father, fulfil this promise; I recommend them to Thee." Then, we may imagine the Father rising, and making His Son to sit at His Right Hand, and saying, "O Blessed Son, I have given to Thee all power and judgment, therefore dispose all things as Thou wilt, concerning Thy disciples and the Coming of the Holy Ghost." Then all the Holy Fathers, and most blessed spirits, who had fallen on their faces in adoration before the Father, arose, began anew their canticles, and sang praises

[1] Acts i. 11.

before God. For if Moses and the children of Israel, after the passage of the Red Sea, sang a song unto the Lord, saying, "Let us sing to the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously,"[1] etc.; and Miriam, the prophetess, his sister, and other women following her, with timbrels and dances,[2] sang unto God; how much more should this be done now, when all enemies are overcome! Similarly, when David brought up the Ark of the Lord to Jerusalem, the whole people rightly chanted, and David, with his singers, struck their harps, and all sang unto the Lord, accompanied by harps and timbrels, and David danced "before the Lord with all his might;"[3] how much more, then, would they now do this, who were truly with the Lord Himself! And if John, as it is related in the Apocalypse, heard a voice in heaven of an hundred and forty-four "harpers harping with their harps,"[4] who sang, as it were, a new song before the Throne of God and of the Lamb; whatever degree of joy may be signified by that, I cannot but imagine that a much greater joy would be the accompaniment of this mystery. They all sing, they all rejoice, they all are glad, all clap their hands, all dance, all exult with shouts of triumph. Truly now in the Heavenly Jerusalem is heard the canticle of gladness, and through all its streets is heard, from every tongue, Alleluia. Never from the foundation of the world was such a Feast celebrated, never a Passover so solemn, nor ever will there be such a day again, except, perhaps, the Day of Judgment, when all the elect shall be presented there, in glorified condition. And therefore I asserted in the beginning, that this Solemnity, all things being considered, outstrips all others. Run, if you will, through all the rest, and you will admit the truth of what I say. A great feast, a great Solemnity is the Incarnation of our Lord, and the source of all good; but it was so

[1] Exod. xv. 1.
[2] Ibid. 20.
[3] 2 Sam. vi. 14.
[4] Rev. xiv. 2, 3.

to us, not to Him, for He was still enclosed in the chamber of the Virgin's womb. A great feast is the Nativity, but that also is so to us. For as far as He was concerned, we must compassionate Him—born to poverty, suffering, and reproach. Great, indeed, is the celebration of the Mystery of the Passion, because then He bore our sins. For, as Gregory says, His Birth would have been no advantage to us, had He not redeemed us; but on account of the most cruel torments and most shameful death which He endured, it could neither be to Himself, nor ought it to be to us, a subject of joy and gladness. Great, too, exceeding great, is the true Paschal Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Himself, both on His own account and for us; because He appeared triumphing gloriously, and we were justified thereby. Very venerable, indeed, is this Festival, and of it alone the Church sings, "This is the Day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it,"[1] according to S. Augustine's comment. Yet this Day of the Ascension is holier than all the rest, and greater; and for this reason. True, that the Lord rose again at Easter, yet He still remained as a pilgrim upon earth; still the gate of Paradise was shut; still were the Holy Fathers not suffered to go to the Father, all of which was accomplished at the Ascension. And if you carefully consider the relation of these mysteries, all previous acts and sufferings of Christ tended to this end, without the attainment of which they were incomplete. For heaven and earth, and all things therein, were made for man; but man was made to obtain glory. Yet till this Day, none had ever attained it since the Fall, however just he might have been. You see, then, how great and wonderful is this Day. Likewise, also, a great Festival is Whit-Sunday, and one which the Church solemnizes with much joy; and rightly so, for then

[1] Ps. cxviii. 24.

she received the highest Gift, the Holy Ghost. But this was for us, and not for Him. This Day's Festival, however, is rightly the most glorious Feast of our Lord Jesus Christ, for to-day He began to sit at the Right Hand of the Father, and ceased to be a Wayfarer.

The Ascension is likewise, in a peculiar manner, the Festival of all the heavenly spirits, because they received a new joy from their Lord, whom they had not seen there before, in the Form of Humanity. And because to-day He began to restore their ranks, which had been broken through the Fall of their brethren, and which were now filled up with such a mighty company of blessed ones, and especially by those illustrious Patriarchs, Prophets, and holy souls who were to-day first introduced into the Heavenly Fatherland. If, then, we keep the Festival of a single Saint who has been translated into heaven, how much more should we celebrate the entrance of a numberless host, yea, of the Holy of Holies Himself! It is the Feast, too, of the Blessed Virgin, who saw to-day her Son exalted, crowned with a Royal Diadem, as true Lord of all, ascending above all. It is also properly our own Festival, for our human nature was to-day exalted above the heavens, because, unless Christ had ascended, that gift of the Holy Ghost which we so rightly celebrate with great solemnity, we could not have received. For He Himself said to His disciples, "It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you."[1] To strengthen my words, I will bring forward the statement of S. Bernard, in his sermon on the Ascension of the Lord: "This solemnity, dearest brethren, is truly glorious. It is the consummation and completion of all other mysteries; it is the happy conclusion of the whole pilgrimage of Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God. Rightly do we keep

[1] S. John xvi. 7.

with solemnity and rejoicing the day when the Sun above the heavens, the Sun of Righteousness, unveiled Himself to our gaze in this world. Great, indeed, is the joy, and above measure our exultation, when, putting off the sackcloth, He girds Himself with gladness, and dedicates the firstfruits of our resurrection. But what to me are all these Festivals, if I am still bound to live upon the earth? I say, then, to dwell thus in exile seems to me not much less tolerable than hell itself. In short, 'If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you.' Do you see, then, how of all Festivals this day's is the sum, a day of results, which puts to account the grace which has been already obtained? As all He did was for us, Who for us was born, so the Ascension was wrought for our sake, and brings us good."[1] Thus S. Bernard.

Manifestly, then, this day is more solemn than all the rest. And the soul which will love the Lord Jesus will rejoice more to-day than on any day of the year. Therefore Christ said to His disciples, "If ye loved Me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father."[2] No day, then, in the Heavenly Country was ever so joyously solemnized, I believe, as this; and this joy and exultation continued till the day of Pentecost. In this manner you may meditate on the Ascension. The Ascension was at the hour of twelve, for at the third hour He sat at meat with His disciples. Although all in Heaven ever rejoice beyond all description, yet we may picture to ourselves a special joy on the Day of the Ascension to the sixth hour of the following day—a joy amongst the Angels, as our Lord showed them some special favour and condescension; in like manner, on the second, amongst the Archangels; on the third, amongst the Principalities; on the fourth, amongst the Powers; on the fifth, amongst the Virtues; on

[1] Serms. ii. and iv. in Asc.

[2] S. John xiv. 28.

the sixth, amongst the Dominions; on the seventh, amongst the Thrones; on the eighth, amongst the Cherubim; on the ninth, amongst the Seraphim: which are the nine orders of Angels. And this rejoicing, perhaps, lasted till the hour of twelve on the vigil of Pentecost. And then the Holy Fathers kept the Festival till the third hour of the Lord's Day.

CHAPTER XCVIII.

Of the Mission of the Holy Ghost.

When all these things were ended, the Lord Jesus said to the Father, "My Father, remember the promise which I made, concerning the Holy Spirit, to My brethren." To Whom the Father, we can imagine, replied, "It is my delight to fulfil this Promise, and the time has arrived; let, therefore, the Holy Spirit descend upon Thy disciples, fill them, console them, fortify them, instruct them with, and confer upon them, the fulness of virtues and heavenly joys. Immediately He came,[1] descending in fiery tongues upon the hundred and twenty disciples who were assembled together, filling them with all joy, strengthening them by His power, teaching them, inflaming them, illuminating them, so that they should go throughout the world, and subject it in great part to themselves.

Yet the heavenly citizens continued to praise the Lord afterwards, and never desisted, and keep the days of gladness with unceasing solemnity and thanksgiving, and with the voice of praise. For it is written, "Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house; they will be always praising Thee."[2] Let us, therefore, hasten to enter into that rest, where such joy flows unceasingly; let us pant after that

[1] Acts ii. 1–4. [2] Ps. lxxxiv. 4.

Country with all our powers. Let us hate the bondage of this vile and miserable body; let us not bestow any anxious care upon it, for it keeps us here in prison, exiles from such blessedness. Let us say, then, with the Apostle, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"[1] And again, "Whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord."[2] And again, "I have a desire to depart, and to be with Christ."[3] Let us, too, desire this dissolution, and continually seek it from the Lord: for in our own strength we are unable to obtain it with safety. And again, let us die, at least, to the world, and to its pomps and lusts. Let us detach ourselves with a brave and steadfast heart from things which are perishing, and from the miserable and transient consolations of this visible world, which poison and lacerate our souls. Let us ascend in mind with the Lord, or rather to the Lord, and with Him let our conversation be in heaven. If thus we act, we may trust that we shall not always be strangers and pilgrims; but in the time of visitation, He will deign to take us to Himself—He of Whom we speak, our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is above all God blessed for ever, and to be praised for ever and ever. Amen.

CHAPTER XCIX.

The Exciting of Desire for the Heavenly Country, through a Longing for Death.

You have hitherto, well-beloved, gone through a great part of the Life of the Lord Jesus, in meditations. Use them reverently, joyously, willingly, stopping wherever your de-

[1] Rom. vii. 24. [2] 2 Cor. v. 6. [3] Phil. i. 23.

votion is excited, and occupying yourself with the thoughts and affections which come to you. For this must be the business of your life, this the foundation on which you build the great fabric of your spiritual life. You must begin with this, to whatever heights you may desire to ascend afterwards, as in many places I have stated. For meditations on the Life of Christ not only sweetly nourish the soul, but they are also the preparation for a higher food. For the things which our Lord did in the Flesh are introductory to those which are wrought in the Spirit, and the ladder by which alone you can attain to contemplate them; so that you must give yourself for a while to the contemplation of His visible Life. As S. Bernard says, "I think that the principal cause why the invisible God should be seen in Flesh, and converse with men, was that those who could only love after a material manner, might have their affections drawn away from carnal objects, and fastened upon the love of His own Flesh; and that by this means He might wean them from what was wrong, and lead them afterwards to a higher love for Himself, even to the love of spiritual things."[1] And again, "He pointed out to His disciples a higher degree of love when He said, 'It is the spirit which quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing.'"[2] And again, "In devotion of the flesh, there is for a while consolation, to him who has not the quickening spirit, in the measure in which those have it who say, 'The Lord Jesus is the Spirit before our face,' or again, 'If we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more.'[3] Indeed, we are not able to love Christ, even in the Flesh, without the Holy Spirit, and without a certain satisfaction. For the measure of this devotion is that its sweetness fills the heart, the whole affections being fastened upon Himself, and thus drawn away from all other

[1] Serm. xx. in Cant. [2] S. John vi. 63. [3] 2 Cor. v. 16.

charms. This is to love Him 'with all the heart.' For if I prefer aught else, whether of natural affection or pleasure, to the Flesh of my Lord, and this affection hinders me from fulfilling those things which by word and example He taught me, is it not clear that I by no means love Him with all my heart, when my heart is divided—a part cleaving to Him, a part turned aside to self?" In fine, He says, "'He that loveth father or mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me.'[1] Therefore, in brief, to love with all our heart, is to postpone everything which charms us, in ourselves, or in others, to the sacred love of the Humanity of Christ. And I include, also, the glory of the world; for the glory of the world is the glory of the flesh, and those who find pleasure in it are doubtless carnal."

You see, however, that meditation is spoken of as carnal, which is on the outward actions of Christ, only as contrasted with that which is on spiritual things; not to disparage devotion to the first, but to lead the soul on with a still greater fervour to the second, so that the affections, and the whole being, may be immersed therein. But good, indeed, is meditation on the Life of Christ, by which a carnal life is destroyed, and the world despised and overcome; by which also the mind is fortified, instructed in virtues, and receives an increase of power, as I have said in my Preface. Meditate, therefore, on the Life of Christ; let this be your sole aim and occupation, your rest, your food, your pursuit. For from this you will not only obtain the blessings of which I have spoken; not only will it be to you a preparation for contemplation upon the Heavenly Country and the Divine Majesty, but it will also be your joy and unfailing consolation. For those who ascend to higher flights of meditation ought ever and anon to turn to Christ's Life. To seem for a moment to be able to rise beyond it without it, would be a

[1] S. Matt. x. 37.

mark of great pride. Thus, ever bear in mind, what has again and again been inculcated in the treatise on Contemplation, about the Sacred Humanity of Christ, which S. Bernard, who was a most profound contemplative, ever taught. He evidently, from his sermons, embraced and extolled without measure devotion to the Life of our Lord.

CHAPTER C.

On the Way of Meditating on the Life of Christ, and on the Conclusion of this Work.

FINALLY, I would provide you with a plan which you may adopt in meditating on the foregoing subjects, for fear that you might attempt to run through the whole at once, and be in consequence overwhelmed with the great weight of it. These meditations ought to occupy the space of one week, entirely given to them.

You must know, then, that it is sufficient to meditate on the actions of our Lord, and the circumstances, as they are given in the Gospel history, rendering yourself present at the scenes, as if you actually saw and heard all that actually passed, or which naturally occurs to you as likely to have happened. It is not necessary that you should introduce into your meditation every moral reflection or authority which I may have brought forward, unless they seem to you to bear clearly upon the virtue you are seeking to embrace, and the vice you are striving to abjure. You may choose, rather, some quiet time for these meditations, late in the day, when you may be able to learn my reflections and quotations, and to commit them to memory. It is fitting that you should thus make use of them; for they are very beautiful, and calculated to instruct you in your whole spiritual life.

You may divide the meditations in the following manner. On Monday, you may go as far as the Flight into Egypt, and stop there. On Tuesday, continue your meditations to the Opening of the Book in the Synagogue. On Wednesday, go on to the ministry of Mary and Martha. On Thursday, from that point pursue the history to the Passion. On Friday and Saturday, to the Resurrection. On the Sunday, take the Resurrection, and continue to the end. Thus, by going through these meditations weekly, you would become familiar with them; and the longer this custom be continued, the more readily will they come to your hand, and the greater will be the sweetness you will derive from them.

Thus, hold converse gladly with the Lord Jesus, and after the example of the blessed Cecilia, strive ever to keep His Life laid up in your heart.

But it is time to seal this book, but not with my own words; it must be concluded by drawing again our nourishment from S. Bernard, from whom we have already gathered flowers, so many and so fair. The conclusion shall be in His Name, Who is the sealed Book, our Lord Jesus Christ, to whose praise the whole book is written. Thus S. Bernard says of that Blessed Name, "'Thy Name is as ointment poured forth.'[1] There is, doubtless, a likeness between oil and the Name of the Spouse, else the Holy Spirit would not have compared them together. There are three properties of oil, in all of which I trace a resemblance to the effects of the Name of the Spouse: oil gives light, food, and unction, unless you have any better explanation to offer; it feeds the fire, it nourishes the flesh, it soothes pain; it is for light, food, and medicine. Now, see the same in the Name of the Spouse: when preached, it gives light; when meditated upon, it gives food; when invoked, it softens and is as unction. Let us glance at each of these effects in

[1] Song of Sol. i. 3.

particular. Whence, think you, throughout the world, did such a sudden and so clear a light of faith spring forth, except from the preaching of the Name of Jesus? Was it not by the light of this Name that God called us 'into His marvellous light'?[1] To those who had been illumined, and in this Light had seen light, did not S. Paul rightly say, 'Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the world'?"[2] And again, "Nor is the Name of Jesus only light, but it is also food. Do you not feel that you gain strength from it, as often as you call it to mind? What is there which nourishes the soul that muses on it, like this Name? What so repairs our wearied senses, strengthens our virtues, transforms our character, and feeds all pure affections? Dry is all food of the soul, if it is not mixed with oil; all is insipid, if it be not seasoned with salt. When you write, I have no pleasure, unless I read the Name of Jesus therein. If you dispute or confer, I have no interest in your labours, unless the sound of Jesus' Name be therein. Jesus is honey in the mouth, music in the ear, joy in the heart; yes, and medicine also. Is any of you sad? let Jesus come into his heart, and flow thence from his lips. Behold, the very dawn of that Name is light, and chases every cloud away, and brings the clear sky! Has any fallen into grievous sin, does he run towards the deadly snare of despair? let him call on the Name of Jesus, and immediately his life will revive. Who ever could stand before this saving Name, and still resist its power, and remain in hardness of heart, deadness of sloth, rancour of mind, and languor of lukewarmness? Who, when the fount of tears perchance refused to flow, by invoking the Name of Jesus, did not find them issue forth anew with great abundance, and flow more sweetly? Who, when trembling and fearing in the presence of danger, ever failed to recover confidence, and banish

[1] 1 Pet. ii. 9. [2] Eph. v. 8.

alarm, by calling on this Name of power? Who, I pray you, when tossed and wavering with doubts, ever called upon this Name of light, without at once attaining the clearness of certitude? Who, when on the verge of distrust in adversity, ever heard the accents of that Name, without gaining back his fortitude? Indeed, the Name of Jesus is the medicine of all these diseases and infirmities of the soul. Let me briefly prove this. 'Call upon Me,' says He, 'in the time of trouble; so will I hear thee, and thou shalt praise Me.'[1] There is nothing like the Name of Jesus for restraining anger, assuaging the swellings of pride, healing the wound of envy, restraining the course of wantonness, quenching the flame of lust, moderating the thirst of covetousness, and putting to flight all lasciviousness. For when I name Jesus, I set before myself the image of the Man, meek and lowly, kind of heart, sober, chaste, merciful, peerless in purity and holiness, and at the same time, the Almighty God, who heals by His example, and strengthens us by His help. When the Name of Jesus is uttered by me, this is the Form which rises up before my mind. From His Humanity, then, I take Him as my Example; from His Divinity, I take Him for my help: the two form to me a sort of compound, the one imparting to the other a certain piquancy, and of both I make for myself a confection, more healing than any remedy of the physicians. This is thy electuary, O my soul, contained in the little vessel, as it were, of the Holy Name. Jesus is, indeed, a Name of Salvation; no plague so virulent, but that this Name can cure thee of it. Let it be ever in thy memory, ever in thy hand, so that all thy senses and actions may be directed towards Jesus. How art thou invited?—'Set Me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thy arm.'[2] But this I will treat elsewhere. Here, then, now you find whence you may

[1] Ps. l. 15. [2] Song of Sol. viii. 6.

be healed, both in your hand and heart. You have, then, in the Name of Jesus, the means of correcting what is bad, and perfecting what is lacking; a preservative of your senses from corruption, a restoration, if already corrupted."[1] And again, "How fair art Thou to Thy angels, O Lord Jesus, in the Form of God, in the day of Thine Eternity, in the splendours of Thy Saints, Whose birth is before the morning-star, the Brightness and Image of the Substance of the Father, the perpetual and cloudless Brightness of Eternal Life! How fair art Thou, my Lord, even in the very surrender of this Thy Beauty! For verily Thou didst empty Thyself when Thou didst lay aside the natural Radiance of Thy unfailing glory; then did Thy goodness become more conspicuous; then did Thy love shine out with greater brilliancy; then did Thy grace in copious streams flow forth from Thee. How dear to me, Star of Jacob, in Thy rising![2] How bright, Thou Flower from the root of Jesse![3] How sweet the light with which Thou didst visit me, when I sat in darkness, O Dayspring from on high! How lovely, how marvellous, Thy Heavenly Power! In Thy Conception of the Holy Ghost, in Thy Birth of the Virgin, in the innocency of Thy Life, in the rivers of Thy Doctrine, in the coruscations of Thy miracles, in the revelations of Thy Sacraments! How red in Thy setting, Thou Sun of Righteousness, how glorious in Thy apparel, when rising out of the heart of the earth! At last, O King of Glory, the highest heavens receive Thee. And how, in the presence of so many marvels, shall not my bones say, 'O Lord, who is like unto Thee?' Such, I think, must have been the affections with which the spouse gazed upon her Beloved, when she exclaimed, 'Behold, Thou art fair, my Love; behold, Thou art fair.'[4] Nor with such thoughts

[1] Serm. xv. in Cant.
[2] Num. xxiv. 17.
[3] Is. xi. 1.
[4] Song of Sol. i. 15.

only as these, but with others also which are above our conception, as she caught sight of a Higher Beauty which is beyond the reach of our vision, and of which we have no experience. By the very repetition of the exclamation, 'Thou art fair,' is represented the twofold Beauty, Human and Divine."[1] Thus far S. Bernard. Thanks be to God, Who liveth for ever and ever. Amen.

[1] Serm. xlv. in Cant.

THE END.

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